

A MORAL

DILEMMA



ANNIE THOMPSON

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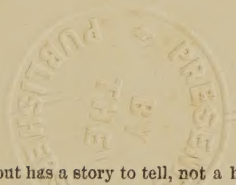
THE ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS.

A MORAL DILEMMA

A NOVEL

BY

ANNIE THOMPSON



"Not a blade of grass but has a story to tell, not a heart but has its romance, not a life which does not hide a secret which is either its thorn or its spur. Everywhere grief, hope, comedy, tragedy ; even under the petrification of old age, as in the twisted forms of fossils, we may discover the agitations and tortures of youth."—H. F. AMIEL.

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

AND NEW YORK: 15 EAST 16th STREET

1893

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PART I.

A MORAL DILEMMA.

CHAPTER I.

THE "Curlew" was yet several miles south of Tenerife: she ploughed her way northward, ignorant of her destination, driven steadily forward by a resistless power. Incessant action, incessant progress; never a moment's rest for her throughout the glaring day or the breathless star-lit night. Oh, if that perpetual throbbing might cease for an instant—if for one brief interval perfect stillness might be realised!

A young man, stretched at full length on a deck chair, wrung his thin fingers in utter wretchedness, even moaned a little, since there was no one near to observe his misery. Throb, throb, throb: endless vibrating of the vessel, endless hissing of the foam-flecked water—

when would the intolerable noise end, and healing silence reign? Healing Silence was not far off from him. He knew it, he wanted to steady his mind and think of it, but how was continuous thought possible in the midst of this jarring tumult?

The deck had been empty for a time: clatter and chink of plates and the hum of voices rising from the saloon, told that a meal was in progress there. Captain Hensleigh, Dr. Brand, and John Cayford, were the first to emerge on deck after it. They had been talking about Alan Twiss, and, seeing that he lay in a sheltered position forward, they moved to the stern of the ship to continue their conversation.

"I suppose then, he will not last long," said the captain.

"Impossible to say. He never allowed me to sound his lungs until to-day: one of them is far gone, and the other affected. According to his own account he comes of a consumptive family and has been ill two years at least. He may live for weeks or even months; he may die in a few days."

“Why don’t you tell him of his danger?” asked John Cayford. “It does not seem fair to let any one drift so near death without warning.”

“You or I may die before he does,” returned the doctor laconically, “think of Simmons!”

Simmons was one of the crew, who had been washed overboard during heavy weather experienced between Hobart and the Cape. The Cape lay far behind them now; the light winds were in their favour; the sun rose daily in a cloudless sky, and shone over a sea so calm that a strong effort was required before the memory of that tragic time of storm could be revived.

“Would it do Twiss any harm to tell him?”

“It might; probably it would. He is so nervous and excitable.”

“Perhaps he knows already,” suggested the captain hopefully. “Did he ask any questions about his condition?”

“Not a question.”

“He cannot know,” insisted Cayford. “He makes constant reference to his return to Melbourne in the Autumn.”

"Oh, they often talk of plans that they are aware they will never live to carry out: excessive hopefulness is quite a feature of the complaint." The doctor lit his cigar and turned away to chat with some ladies who had just appeared on deck.

"You agree with me, Captain, don't you?" said Cayford earnestly. "He *must* be told."

"Well"—the captain hesitated—"I suppose Dr. Brand has his reasons: it might do harm. I must say I should prefer to know, if I were in the poor young fellow's place. He talks more to you than to any of us, Mr. Cayford: I daresay you will have an opportunity to give him just a hint of his condition." Having made this reasonable suggestion, the captain felt that he was relieved from further responsibility in the matter. He too walked forward, stopping for a few moments beside the deck chair.

"Fine day, Mr. Twiss; how are you feeling?"

"Captain, are we far from Tenerife?"

As soon as the words were uttered, they seemed to be caught up and repeated by the

throbbing engines and the hissing water—Are we far from Tenerife?—Are we far from Tenerife? Alan lay with his eyes closed, breathing painfully, forced to listen to the ringing sound.

The captain looked off to the horizon for his answer.

“Three hundred and sixty knots since yesterday: this is Monday: Tuesday, Wednesday—if all goes well we shall be at Santa Cruz on Wednesday.”

“Thank you.”

Oh, this intolerable noise: Santa Cruz on Wednesday—Santa Cruz on Wednesday—hissing and throbbing and ringing in his ears! Captain Hensleigh’s expression was grave enough when he left the invalid.

Two or three ladies walking rapidly up and down the deck, now stepped softly up to the young man’s side. As he made no movement, they began to talk in those aggravating whispers that are so much more penetrating than louder sounds.

“He is asleep,” they assured each other.

"How wasted he looks !"

"You heard what the doctor said ? He must be dying."

"So young, too !"

"And he has such a pretty profile !"

"Isn't it sad !"

They stole away on tip-toe.

John Cayford remained where the captain had left him. Death ! He had never been very near to death before. It was long since his parents died, his recollection of that time was faint and vague : his only sister had died recently, but he was at a distance from her, and to hear of death does not produce the same appalling effect upon the senses as to see it. He was beginning to experience that crushing sense of impotence which overcomes strength when it is confronted by greater strength. He had never yet been forced to succumb to any difficulty, failure was an unknown experience to him : good luck, good management, and some shrewdness, had done much for him, and would do more. Implicit confidence in his own strength, was his unspoken creed. He was not a selfish

man—he was quite as ready to use his abilities in the service of others as in his own: others, indeed, afforded him larger scope for exercising ingenuity, for they placed themselves in dilemmas which his forethought would not allow him to approach. Conscious of his own power, he loved to exert it, and to feel that people were dependent on it. This was the explanation of the close intimacy that had sprung up between himself and Alan Twiss. They had met for the first time at Hobart, and the weakness of the invalid was an irresistible appeal to the strength of his fellow traveller. With infinite patience and gentleness, Cayford ministered to the needs of his unfortunate companion: he humoured his fancies, read to him, talked to him, carried him on deck when he was too feeble to walk, and sat for hours by his berth fanning him when he lay exhausted by the extreme heat. It really seemed as though some reviving hopefulness had been infused into the patient—Alan certainly rallied; but alas! three days ago there had been an attack of hemorrhage, and the poor lad lost all the ground he

had gained. Looking at him now, Cayford saw that he must die, and the sight was intensely distressing to him. His own perfect health, and strength, and good prospects, seemed like cruel insults offered to the sufferer; insults for which reparation ought to be made. But what could be done?

Alan had for some time been lying with his eyes closed: he now raised his head and beckoned to his friend to come near him.

"I wish you would bring a chair here, and place yourself so that we can speak without interruption," he said. "Those ladies will not keep away. They ask me every few minutes how I feel. If I cough, they raise their eyebrows and look at each other and shake their heads. I am tired of telling them how long I slept last night, and how much breakfast I ate this morning."

"They mean well, Alan."

"Yes, I daresay. Wait until you have been worried as long as I have, and you will wish that people meant ill, for a change."

"Have you slept at all this afternoon?"

"No. How could I, with the sea always there whenever I look up? I wish you could shift me somehow, so that I shall not be forced to see it."

John easily changed the invalid's position, but the movement made Alan cough.

"Everything is against me!" he exclaimed fretfully, "I wanted to talk to you, and now I shall have to lie quiet."

"Suppose I talk to you, instead."

"Ah, do! Say something, anything that will keep me from listening to these never-ending sounds."

"What sounds?"

"That hideous grinding of the screw and churning of the water—no rest, no rest!"

John looked at him in astonishment, and with some alarm; he himself was not overburdened with imagination.

"What can I tell you that will be of interest, I wonder. You have lived in Glasgow; perhaps you know Feldrossan, a little fishing village on the Ayrshire coast, I was born there."

"I don't know it. Did you live there long?"

“Always until I went to Melbourne. I used to go up to Glasgow every day to business, but my sister and I lived at Feldrossan together.”

“A sister,” said Alan, “I would like to have a sister. I have a half-brother, a rascal—*curse* him!”

“Now, Alan, be quiet; don’t excite yourself so absurdly. What is the use of saying things you don’t mean, and will be sorry to think of presently?”

Alan sighed, and the colour that had suddenly flushed his face died out of it as suddenly. After a long pause he roused himself.

“Santa Cruz on Wednesday. I am very anxious to get there.”

“You expect to meet a friend, don’t you?”

“Yes, if he is there; but I am not certain. He was there a year ago, and I have written to him since without getting any answer. He may have gone away, or he may be dead. If he is dead, I suppose I shall see him soon. I am dying, you know.”

Meeting an intensely wistful gaze, that implored a denial of the assertion just made, John

looked away hastily. He was filled with pity for the dying man, involuntarily he clasped his hand closely.

“I know, my poor lad,” he said, “I know.”

“There isn’t any need to pity me,” remarked the invalid. “The longer I have to live, the more I shall suffer, and I hate pain. But I am a coward about dying: I have seen people die, I know what to expect. Sometimes when I cough and can’t get breath, I wonder whether it is beginning—the long gasping fight for breath till one is choked. Bah! Perhaps if you were near and held my hand as you are doing now, it would not be so bad.” He raised himself to look out over the waste of waters, and closed his eyes, shuddering. After an interval of silence, he spoke again. “I thought I should despair, if I failed to find Corbett at Tenerife: but you have been so good to me that I believe you will be willing to help me. Am I right?”

“What do you want, Alan? I will very gladly do anything for you that I can.”

Alan told his tale, pausing often to rest

himself and gather fresh strength to proceed.

“My father,” he said, “was twice married; my mother, his second wife, died of consumption when I was a child. I have a step-brother, Richard, my senior by twenty years. When my father died, he left some house property in Glasgow between us two. Richard managed it, and paid me my share of the proceeds every year. He was a solicitor in partnership with my father. I had found employment in another legal firm; I did not care for the work, but I had to do something and no other opening presented itself. Mr. Anderson, my junior employer, took a very kind interest in me, shewing me many favours both in business hours and out of them. Part of the work I was entrusted with was the collection of rents, some in the country, some in town. Suddenly my health gave way. I knew I had taken a bad chill, but I was careless about myself until one day I had a violent attack of hemorrhage. Then I was forced to see a doctor, and he told me that unless I left Scotland at once I would be dead

before the winter was over. My illness had made me very depressed and listless: I had no wish to leave Glasgow, because I had no wish to live. I thought I had rather die quietly at home, and that I could exist on the money Richard paid me yearly, until death came. But, when I explained my intentions to him, Richard startled me with the information that I was already considerably in his debt. It appeared that our property had depreciated in value, and had for some time yielded less than sufficed to keep it in repair. Knowing me to be delicate, Richard said he had not liked to deprive me of the sum I had been accustomed to receive from him: so he had paid it to me out of his own purse. I was distressed at this, for I hated him, and could not bear to be under obligations to him. Then I received a kind communication from my employers: they had been asked to find some one to fill a place in a solicitor's office in Cape Town, and they offered to recommend me. Mr. Anderson urged me to take this chance: Richard also urged me to go, saying that if I would relinquish all claim to

our joint property he would assist me by giving me £200, and would consider my past obligations cancelled. I closed with both offers, and went; taking passage in a sailing ship in order to benefit as much as possible by the sea air.

“When I reached the Cape two months later, I made some discoveries about myself. Letters were waiting me, and from them I learned that I was accused of theft. It appeared that I had received £50 from a farmer in payment of his rent; that I had given him a receipt for it, but had failed to convey the money to my employers. I was assured that in consideration of my ill health, of the irreproachableness of my former conduct, and of the fact that my brother had generously made good the deficiency, no proceedings would be taken against me: but the recommendation given me was cancelled, and the circumstances had been communicated to the gentleman to whose office I was going. You thought I was quite respectable, didn’t you, John; what do you think of me now?”

“Of course there was some mistake, you were not to blame. What proof had they?”

“Oh, they had proof. The receipt for the rent, neatly mounted on cardboard, was sent me by my brother, who advised me to hang it where I could constantly see it, so that I might always be reminded of the way in which I had disgraced myself and him. He said that he had done more for me before I left Scotland, than he was in any way bound to do; and in paying £50 to cover my disgrace he had been prompted solely by the desire to clear as far as possible the name which he had the misfortune to share with me. He added that he did not wish to hear more of me, that he would return unopened any letters I might send, and that I need not expect further communications from himself.

“One other letter reached me. It was from Mr. Anderson: it was full of warning and kindness and sympathy. He actually enclosed money lest I should be driven to extremities before I could find any employment. My first impulse was to write to him at once, indignantly denying the charge made against me; but I reflected that I had no proof of my inno-

cence, and that words alone would never clear me in the eyes of those who had been so ready to believe me guilty. The receipt was a forgery, and Mark Presslie, a fellow clerk of mine, was the forger. I remembered the circumstances perfectly. This rent and several others had fallen due a day or two before my illness: Presslie had rents to collect on a neighbouring estate, and seeing how miserably unwell I looked, he offered to call for me at this particular farm which lay nearer to his route than to mine. He was my senior in the office, and had shown me much kindness: I was thankful enough to be relieved, and never dreamed of doubting him when he told me that he had handed in the money along with his own, and had explained the matter at the office. Then followed my illness and departure.

“When I almost despaired of finding any proof that would clear me, it flashed across my mind that Mark Presslie had not been alone when he went to collect the rents that day. A friend of his and of mine had been with him—

John Corbett. Corbett and I had been fellow students at the University: after he took his degree, his health gave way, and he was sent out to Colorado. Four years later he returned, just before my breakdown. I wrote to him from the Cape, telling him my trouble, entreating him to help me. His answer came after three months, but I had worried myself into brain fever by that time. As I became convalescent, the depression and lassitude from which I had suffered before, returned with far greater force. If I had energy enough to long for anything, I longed for death. When Corbett's letters came, I read them as though they referred to another person. The past seemed to be a dream, the future a blank, the present did not interest me in the least. Every night before I slept, I used to say 'God grant I may die before to-morrow.' I prayed for death then, and I had to live: I pray for life now, and I have to die. It is all a mockery."

A violent fit of coughing interrupted him. Cayford had a vague idea that he ought to rebuke him for calling prayer a mockery: but

while he was choosing his words, Alan spoke again.

"Here are Corbett's letters. You must read them yourself; I want all my strength to tell you the rest of my tale."

"You are not wise to speak more, now," said John. "Give me the letters to look at, and finish what you have to say to-morrow."

"How do you know that I shall be alive to-morrow," gasped the invalid. "I tell you, I *must* speak now. I may never have another chance."

"Go on then; but talk slowly, don't exert yourself more than you need."

Alan lay silent for a few minutes, and then continued.

"While I was waiting to hear from Corbett, I wrote to a relation of my mother's who lived at Melbourne. This gentleman had corresponded with me occasionally, ever since my mother's death: and when I was ordered abroad, I should have gone out to him if the doctor had not urged me to try the Cape. During my illness, the people I lodged with

thought I was dying, and they searched through my papers to see who should be communicated with. They found a letter from Mr. Masson, and wrote to him. He came at once. As soon as I was strong enough to be moved, he took me back with him to Melbourne. He had neither wife nor child, he treated me as though I were his son. He made me live with him, and seeing that I was sensitive about being dependent on him, he gave me work in his office, and paid me a salary ridiculously out of proportion to all I did. Before I left Melbourne to come home, I asked him what had induced him to befriend me so: he told me, under his breath, as though he could scarcely steady his voice to say it, that years ago he had loved my mother. Then I understood. John!" cried the invalid, suddenly fixing an intense gaze upon his companion, "can you guess what forces me to come home now? When first I heard how they had defamed me, I was mad with the desire to clear myself, to repay Richard's taunts, to blacken Presslie's name as he had blackened mine: but I tell

you, when a man has been down, down, almost to the grave, and feels his feet slipping further in every day, some of his ambitions get dwarfed. After I was so ill I ceased to care what any of them thought of me. I knew I must die of consumption sooner or later. When letters arrived from Corbett with proofs of my innocence and Mark's guilt, I put them aside and took credit to myself for not using them: I thought I was developing a fine amount of Christian charity. But—but——" his voice broke suddenly, "I loved a girl. God! Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," John answered simply, "I do."

"I loved her with all my heart and soul. To be near her, to hear her voice, to see her face, to touch her hand—that meant heaven to me. Once, when I was in her presence, some one spoke of a young fellow we all knew who had gone to the bad. I shall never forget the awful look of pity that came into her face. It made me feel as though I had seen God look on sin. It made me long to do something to save the poor wretch who had caused it. Two

months ago it came to my knowledge that she had been informed of my disgrace. Every night since then, I see her in my dreams with that same look of pity in her face *for me*. I cannot stand it. I care nothing about men's opinions of me, but I do care about hers. She never knew I loved her, I never hoped to make her love me: but I cannot have her think of me as a thief, I cannot have her look at me like that. I must live to clear myself: I will have this disgrace wiped out. Night and morning I pray to God to let me live till this is done; but if He will not let me do it for myself, Corbett must do it; or, failing him, you must do it. Corbett was to meet me at Tenerife. If he is not there, promise me that if I die before I reach home, you will see these papers of mine placed in Mr. Anderson's hands, and my name cleared."

He gasped out the appeal so passionately, that John dreaded the effect of the excitement on him.

"Corbett and I are the only two who know your side of the story?"

“The only two.”

“Then, if he fails you, and you cannot do it for yourself, I promise to give your papers into Mr. Anderson’s hands and to see justice done to you.”

“Swear it!”

“I swear it.”

In his excitement, Alan raised himself upright.

“Tell Mary——” he said, and choked. John started to his feet in dismay as the red blood oozed out between his friend’s lips. Hemorrhage again.

CHAPTER II.

FORTUNATELY the hemorrhage was very slight. Alan Twiss passed a quiet night and slept during the greater part of Tuesday.

"He has made a surprising rally," the doctor said to Cayford. "He seems to have been wonderfully little weakened by the loss of blood."

"Do you think he will live to reach England?"

"He might perhaps, if he were careful. He actually talks of going ashore at Santa Cruz."

"What folly! You will surely forbid it."

"I have told him it is madness to think of such a thing, but I can scarcely turn the key in his cabin door. He says he has important business in the town."

"I think he could entrust his business to me. I had better go and speak to him."

"Indeed you had better not: he excited himself too much when he spoke to you last. Be-

sides, he is asleep ; I gave him a sedative which should keep him quiet for a few hours longer. We have made such good speed yesterday and to-day, that the captain thinks we shall anchor in the Bay before midnight and be off again by 6 o'clock in the morning. If only the poor young fellow can sleep through the noise of coaling, my mind will be relieved."

"And mine," said John.

In preparation for going ashore at Santa Cruz, he read the letters Alan had given him ; hoping to glean from them some information about the writer. They were two in number, both written from Tenerife.

CALLE SAN ANTONIO, SANTA CRUZ,

January 3rd, 188—

MY DEAR ALAN :

Your letter, dated last November has been forwarded to me from home. I am amazed at its contents, and must at once relieve your mind by telling you that I can send you the proofs you ask for, though there will be delay before they reach you. I suppose you have heard nothing of my changed circumstances. My father died soon after you left the country ; and when his affairs were examined, they were found to be very much involved. He had been speculating freely and unfortunately : I believe the worry and anxiety he went

through, told upon his health. It was some time before our exact position could be ascertained ; then it appeared that after the liabilities were met, only about £2000 remained for me. Fortunately my sisters were provided for. Our house in Glasgow and some £8000 belonged to my mother, and has been settled by her on the two girls.

I had serious thoughts of applying for the desk you vacated in Messrs. Claverton and Anderson's office, but the doctor vetoed that idea. My old symptoms were returning, and he said I must winter abroad. I had almost decided to go back to Colorado, when I heard that the English photographer in Santa Cruz wanted to leave Tenerife, and would dispose of his house and business on moderate terms. There can't have been much competition, for my small offer was at once accepted. You know that photography was my one hobby : I certainly never dreamed of practising it professionally ! However I am here in the capacity of photographer, and so far I have done remarkably well.

Now for your affairs. My poor Alan, you have indeed been treated abominably. I could not have believed that Presslie would stoop so low. I know he wanted money at the time, for he wrote to me to ask if I could accommodate him with £50 for a few days, and I could not do it. I have his letter and shall send it to you. You are right in thinking that I went with Mark to Whitecairns. An Ayrshire friend of mine had asked me to buy a pair of young farm horses for him ; and, as I learned from Mark that some of the farmers on the Netherwood estate had horses for sale, I arranged to accompany him when he went rent collecting. We called at the Netherwood farms first, and then went to White-

cairns for you. I was in the room with Mark when he counted out the notes and gave March the receipt. These recollections are not of much practical value perhaps, but I have papers that are. They are at home, packed away in an old desk with a number of letters which, luckily for you, I was too busy to look over and destroy before I left Glasgow. I shall write for the desk, and of course everything that concerns this unfortunate business will be forwarded to you at once.

Meanwhile, you must not lose heart. It will not be long before we have your innocence plainly proved. If you are able to return to Glasgow when the winter is over, I will go with you to see justice done. If you cannot leave the Cape, give me directions, and I will go alone to astonish Presslie and your brother. I shall carefully observe your wish, and say nothing on this subject to any one, till you give me leave.

Yours ever,

JOHN CORBETT.

CALLE SAN ANTONIO, SANTA CRUZ,

February 1st, 188—

DEAR ALAN :

Here are the proofs I promised : there are three of them. The first is a letter written in four different handwritings. Your and my signatures are in it, though we never wrote them there. It is dated a fortnight before your name was forged. One night soon after my return from Colorado, MacIvor, Rentoul, Presslie, and I were dining together. I told them of an American I knew who could write four different types

of handwriting with perfect ease. I called this a remarkable feat, but Mark affected to think very little of it. He said it was uncommon rather than wonderful, and not more extraordinary than the imitation of four distinct voices by one person. He said that he had great facility in copying handwritings himself, and would wager £5 that, with a week's practise, he could imitate so perfectly the writing of any three men I liked to name, that I should be unable to detect any difference between his imitation and the originals. I took the bet and challenged him to imitate my writing, Rentoul's, and yours, the three most varied types I could think of. A week later we all dined together again; and he wrote at my dictation a letter which he commenced and ended in his own autograph, while ours were imitated in the three intermediate sentences. It was a piece of insane folly; the danger of which I never realised until you told me of your misfortune. I blame myself more than I can say, for my share in it.

The second enclosure is the letter in which Mark asks for a loan of £50. The third is the most conclusive proof of all. It is a letter he wrote to me regarding the farm horses I was commissioned to purchase. He must have written it hurriedly, or he never would have committed himself as he does in this sentence: "On the whole, I do not think you will see better horses than those at lower Netherwood, except the pair March shewed us when we called for his rent on Thursday. I think he could easily be induced to sell them." How could he have allowed himself to write such a sentence!

I am quite convinced that Presslie never intended to harm you as he has done. He must have been in great straits for the money: I believe he yielded suddenly to

the temptation to sign your name that afternoon, probably expecting to refund the rent long before the fraud was discovered. It is a deplorable business from first to last. He is a coward to let the disgrace fall on you: and for my part I feel as guilty as though I had instigated the forgery myself. Write and tell me what you propose to do, and count on all the assistance I can give you.

Yours ever,

JOHN CORBETT.

None of the enclosures referred to were in the letters.

Shortly after midnight, the "Curlew" dropped anchor in Santa Cruz Bay. In answer to her whistle, Dr. Ruméo's boat, and that of the English Agents, were already approaching; followed by others containing fruit cargo and voluble Spaniards. The few passengers who were on deck, stood watching the flotilla that crept toward them out of the darkness. As soon as Dr. Ruméo declared the ship out of quarantine, the Spaniards swarmed on board. Then commenced noisy confusion, which lasted till the vessel left, and formed a bewildering contrast to the quiet routine of the past fortnight.

John was perplexed to know what he should do. Was it worth while to go at once to the town, or should he wait where he was for two or three hours? While he debated, his arm was touched. Beside him stood Alan, clinging to the bulwarks for support.

"Fetch me a chair please," he said, "and see about hiring a boat for me. I must go on shore."

John gazed blankly at him, dumb with vexation and amazement: then he went for a chair. Dr. Brand was with him when he returned. The two men tried remonstrance and persuasion in vain: Alan only reiterated his demand to have a boat hired.

"I am well able to go," he said. "Since Monday I have done nothing but sleep, and I feel quite strong. Nothing you can say will hinder me. I mean to go: if you will not come with me, I must go alone."

Seeing that opposition was useless, they tried to persuade him to wait for an hour or two, until there was more light: but even this he refused. There was nothing for it but an

immediate start. The doctor leaned over the bulwarks, trying to distinguish the faces of the boatmen who waited a few feet away from the ship.

"I used to know some of these fellows," he said, "but it is almost too dark to recognise them."

His remark was overheard by one of the shipping agents who stood near.

"Can I be of any use to you, gentlemen?"

They told him what they wanted.

"Marco!" he called.

"Si Señor."

A boat shot through the water to the ship's side.

"Marco, you will take three gentlemen to the mole for five pesetas."

"Impossible, Señor! For fifteen."

"That is robbery Marco. Five pesetas is more than enough."

"Is there luggage?"

The question was translated and negatived.

"There is no luggage, Marco."

"Señor, I could not do it."

“Bueno ! You are not the only one : there are others who will.”

A pause.

“Dos duros ?” suggested a voice from the boat.

“What is the hindrance,” cried Alan impatiently ; “let us be off, why are we waiting ?”

“The man wants to charge you double your proper fare.”

“What does that signify : let him have what he asks.”

“Well—they are all thieves. Marco is perhaps less a thief than the others.”

The events that followed, seemed to John like a miserable nightmare. He tried again to dissuade his friend from leaving the ship ; but every word of remonstrance irritated the invalid so much, that it seemed worse than useless. Alan attempted to walk to the gangway, and almost fell : after some trouble they placed him in a chair and lowered it over the ship’s side into the boat. John and the doctor took their seats, and were followed presently by

the gentleman who had hired the boat for them.

"My Spanish may be of use to you," he said, as they were being rowed through the water. "Can either of you speak it?"

"I once lived in Buenos Ayres for a couple of years, and picked up a little there," said the doctor. "But I have forgotten most of it. We shall be glad of your help."

They glanced significantly from the invalid to each other. John held Alan's hand in his; and feeling a pressure from the fingers that were clasped round his own, he leaned his head close to his friend's. Alan spoke in a whisper.

"In my cabin . . . a small metal box."

"I understand. You want to tell me that the papers are there."

"Papers, addresses, all. It has a padlock; the key is in my pocket. You will take care of it?"

"The greatest care."

"Don't open it till you reach home. You might lose them."

"I understand, Alan. You must not talk more : you are not fit to speak."

"Mary. . ."

"Yes, yes, I know. You want her to hear everything. I will find her out and tell her."

Another close pressure of the thin fingers, and then :

"John, I did not mean to be impatient with you. I was afraid. I could not bear to die at sea. The water is so cold."

John looked at him, aghast.

"Alan ! what is it ? What is it ?"

They were close to the mole, the light streamed down on their faces. Alan's eyes had in them a far-away happy look.

"Death," he said, gently. "Tell Mary."

When they lifted him out of the boat his heart had stopped beating.

They had feared such a consummation as this, and yet it was a terrible shock. Irresolutely they stood looking at each other.

"What is to be done ?" John asked. "We can surely take him somewhere. You have an English burying ground, I suppose."

"Yes, we have a burying ground : but, in the meantime—? You see there is a regulation in force here, forbidding the removal of any body from the mole until the Mayor has seen it and given his consent."

"Then some one must go to the Mayor for us."

"He will not be disturbed at so early an hour."

"Not even in a case of this kind?"

"No."

"There are buildings on the mole : can we not make use of one of them?"

"I will ask ; but these fellows are so superstitious that I fear they will not let you take your dead friend into one of their sheds."

It proved to be as he said. No one would give the required permission.

"When can we send for the Mayor?"

"It is 2 o'clock now ; he will not come down before 5 at the earliest."

"And we sail at 5.30!"

"Has he any friends here? You might send for them."

“Oh yes,” said John, much relieved. “He expected to meet Mr. John Corbett who lives in the Calle San Antonio. Perhaps you know him.”

“My dear sir! if you mean the young fellow of that name who came out from Glasgow to take a photographic business here, he has been dead nine months. He was not too strong when he came out; and a chill he took at Laguna last Autumn, killed him in a few days.”

John gave a groan of despair.

“What *can* we do?”

“I can only suggest that you leave the affair in the hands of the English Consul and myself. Give me your instructions, and I will see that they are faithfully carried out. Will you come to my office now, and arrange what you would like done?”

“You go,” said John to his companion. “I can’t leave him here alone.”

As the two gentlemen walked away, he turned again to the chair and its silent occupant; and kneeling down beside his friend, he gazed at the dead face until the vision grew

blurred. It seemed impossible that Alan could be dead. He thought he heard him breathe; he thought he saw the movement of respiration; he thought the eyelids quivered as he watched them. Death had beautified the face; the brow that pain had contracted was smooth now, the fretful expression had vanished, the lips were parted with a smile. John thought of his own life, comparatively free from grief; the past full of bright memories, the future full of brighter hopes. All sunshine for him: all darkness for that other—dead, under a cloud of disgrace, without even the chance to clear himself in the eyes of the girl he had loved. Poor lad, poor lad!

After a short absence, the doctor returned, and together they searched to see if Alan had any valuables about him. They found nothing but a letter-case, containing in one pocket a key of which John took possession, and in another a bank note of sufficient value to cover the expenses of interment. Remembering Alan's last words, John felt that the money had been placed there for that purpose.

This duty done, they waited the summons to return to the ship. Now and again they exchanged a few words : speaking in whispers, as though Alan only slept, and might at any time awaken and hear them. They watched the grey dawn burn into day. They watched Grand Canary emerge from ghost-like shadows into vivid reality. They watched the heavy clouds of mist drift back from the island on which they stood. Every moment the light grew stronger the sea flashed and sparkled : birds filled the air with music : groups of peasants, singing gaily, trooped down the steep Laguna road into Santa Cruz : the sleepy little town throbbed with life :—and beside them, in awful contrast, was that still, dead Presence. It was a relief to the tension of their feelings when the ship's signal sounded and forced them to leave. Yet it seemed hard to go without some farewell. A queer constricted feeling about their throats, made speech impossible ; but as they stood and looked at Alan for the last time, both men thought how sad it was to leave him there without a friend to tend him.

Marco rowed them back to the ship, which presently moved away out into the ocean. The passengers were all on deck, eager to see the Peak. In the vessel's stern were two men, gazing fixedly on the solitary figure that seemed as though it watched them from the end of the mole.

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PART II.

CHAPTER I

FORTUNE smiled upon Gavin Wishart : and straightway many people, by whom he had been hitherto unnoticed, began to favour him with their smiles also—so that life appeared to him to be a pleasant thing, and he, as the object of so many smiles, a pleasant and amiable person. Before Fortune smiled upon him, his estimation of life and of himself, was widely different : life was unbearable, he was despicable. This was always most evident to him just before his salary was due, when the weight of unpaid bills became oppressive ; but after the money was actually in his hands and his eyes had grown accustomed to the sight of unreceipted accounts, the feeling died down for a time.

He was looked upon with interest, in those days, only by his employers and his creditors. To the former he seemed to be a fairly intelligent and trustworthy young man, who had

served them for ten years without provoking their wrath or their admiration. They were genuinely sorry to part with him when the necessity for parting came, and they told him so in terms which caused him to loathe himself for ten minutes, and admire their discrimination for the remainder of the day.

His creditors had at first been impressed by his graceful ease of manner which suggested a corresponding ease of circumstances. He rose in their regard when it became evident that he was a competent judge of the goods supplied to him. He smoked little, but his cigars must be of the best: he drank less, but only the finest wines would content him. At his rooms, which were small and in an obscure neighbourhood, evidences of his extravagance were visible in the quality of the stationery he used, and in the type and binding of the few books he possessed. Unfortunately all his desires were costly, and he had hitherto been able to attempt to satisfy them only to a limited degree and at intervals of time. When credit failed him, he starved his various appetites,

pleased to observe the extent of his powers of self-control ; and resigned himself to the importunities of his creditors with an indifference which he admired, and they did not. His debts were small ; he compared them with the debts of other men and found them trifling ; unhappily his income was smaller—Fate was clearly to blame for gifting him with expensive tastes, and failing to provide means sufficient for their satisfaction. Any alteration in his own habits was out of the question.

Indifference toward creditors, is an attitude that cannot be maintained indefinitely. A time came when public exposure was threatened. Then philosophy withdrew her support, the young man's face became haggard, anxiety overpowered him, his state of mind grew desperate. He actually went to the length of pawning his watch to procure himself a pistol, and sat with it in his hand for hours, one night, lacking the nerve to hold it to his head. Next morning he received the news that £200,000, the property of a distant relative who had taken no notice of his legatee during his life

time, had been left to him, under certain conditions.

Blessed, blessed change ! The hand of Providence was clearly evidenced in it. The very conditions laid down by the testator must have been devised in heaven, so completely did their fulfilment release Gavin Wishart from his unhappy past and start him on an entirely new career. A feeling of awe took possession of him, he saw himself to be one particularly favoured by God. He determined to be punctilious in his attendance at church, and to revive sundry pious customs of his youth which had lately fallen into disuse. He now thought debt to be a hideously dishonourable state, into which he would never, in any circumstances, allow himself to relapse : and as unlimited credit was again at his command, this resolution appeared to him highly virtuous. He also subscribed handsomely to two or three charities, which in the days of his poverty he would have liked to aid had cigars and wines been a little less costly. These initial steps taken, he repaired to the house of his deceased relative,

and began to surround himself with the things that his soul loved.

There followed months of beatified existence. Having early acquired the faculty of closing his eyes to painful sights, he rarely looked upon his past. It was now and then brought to his remembrance in church, when, his impressionable senses being stirred to their depths by solemn music, some allusion in the service to the great deliverances wrought by Jehovah for His people, betrayed Gavin into momentary introspection. At such times he found himself thanking God very fervently for having raised him up out of deep waters. He invariably doubled his contribution to the offertory on these occasions. There were also times—the faintest recollection of which made him shudder—when he found himself obliged to give utterance to words which all the casuistry he had at his command could not prevent him from knowing to be untrue: these, happily for his peace of mind, were infrequent.

Of late a new influence had stolen into his life, diminishing his pleasure in finely flavoured

cigars, distracting his thoughts when he was bent on enjoying a sonata of Mozart's, or Hamerton's "Intellectual Life." He questioned vaguely what the cause might be; and when for a brief space a slender hand lay within his own and timid eyes raised themselves to meet his glance, enlightenment came to him—he loved. For two hours one night, sleep deserted him while he meditated on this momentous subject. She was beautiful, else she had not charmed his beauty-loving senses; but she was of obscure parentage and had no money. If he married her, it would be said that he had thrown himself away; in his present position he could make a much better match. On the other hand, he was all but convinced that she was indispensable to his happiness. He met her again, and the conviction became a certainty. He would marry her—his was not one of those sordid souls forever on the outlook for pecuniary advantage! The longer he thought of his resolution, the more certain he became that it was additional evidence of that innate nobility of his, which must have moved a dis-

cerning Providence to treat him with such favour.

It was at this juncture in his affairs, that a terrible fire occurred at Cooper's Mill, causing such frightful loss of life and property, that a feeling of profound distress was excited by it in the public mind. It broke out at a late hour in the afternoon when all hands were at work, and a high wind drove the flames through the great building with fatal rapidity. The foremen seemed quite unable to control the mill hands, who rushed hither and thither frantic with terror, blocking the passages, crowding at the doors and windows, crushing against each other, praying, shrieking, cursing. Outside aid was long in coming and inefficient when it came: there was little left to save when the fire was at last subdued, and meantime such scenes of horror had been witnessed that the newspaper readers shuddered over their comfortable breakfasts next morning. They censured the mill owners (who were absent at the time) for not leaving more competent men in charge; for not providing more numerous exits

to a building where so many people were employed; for having allowed the fire extinguishing appliances that were on the premises to fall into such disrepair as to be almost useless; they began to censure the foremen for not keeping better order among the panic stricken workers—but the foremen's names were in the list of the dead, and censure ceased. Every one agreed that something must be done at once to aid the survivors. The question was, who would take the matter in hand? The Provost was out of town, most of the influential people had gone to their country houses—the fire could not have occurred at a more unfortunate time of year.

“Every one's business” would have been left to the proverbial No-one, had not the Rev. Dr. Forbes of St. Martin's, with Mr. Claverton, Mr. Twiss, and other representative men, met in consultation, and decided to enlist the sympathies of Gavin Wishart.

“If he has inherited anything of my old friend's benevolent spirit, along with his name and his money, he will be eager to seize this

opportunity to help the needy," remarked Dr. Forbes hopefully.

"It certainly is an excellent chance for him to take that leading place in the ranks of philanthropists which I am persuaded he intends to occupy. If the Provost had been in town we must have applied to him: I look upon it as quite providential that he is absent," said Richard Twiss.

"Very providential—when you compare the Provost's income with Mr. Wishart's," added William Claverton.

Mr. Twiss with his usual practical forethought, suggested that he should go at once to the scene of the fire, and bring back word of the extent to which help would be needed: the remainder of the deputation, after some delay, retired to Gavin Wishart's house.

They were ushered into a room, where, for many years, petitioners of all kinds had been welcomed by the remarkably benevolent old man whose death had thrown such gloom over the whole of the charitable world. That section of the charitable world, which maintains

itself by extracting money from A and handing part of it over to B, had been bitterly grieved to learn that beyond bequeathing considerable sums to be administered in trust for two special hobbies of his—the Aid of Discharged Prisoners, and the Relief of Ladies in Distressed Circumstances—old Gavin Wishart had done nothing for the numerous other schemes he had started and assisted, but had left the bulk of his property to a very distant relative, a young man not yet thirty, hitherto a clerk in a lawyer's office. There was just a chance that the heir might prove to be lavishly generous: it was considered ominous, however, that he lost no time in transferring to the hands of Messrs. Claverton and Anderson, his late employers, the fortune that Richard Twiss had had the management of for years—Richard Twiss having come to be identified in the public mind with his client's benefactions, since he was the channel through which the old man chose latterly to be approached.

“We always looked to your relative for help in such distressing cases as this,” said Dr. Forbes,

when Gavin had greeted his visitors. "Old folks are slow to learn new ways; that must be our apology for finding our way here, as usual, now that we are in want."

Gavin assured him, gracefully enough, that there was no need to apologise. "How can I help?" he asked. "You must have money, of course; is there anything else I can give?"

They asked leave to send out their appeal for aid in his name.

"Does that mean that you wish me to act as secretary, Dr. Forbes?"

"Not at all, not at all: we could never dream of making such a demand on your time! Our good friend Richard Twiss, who is always ready to undertake the drudgery of this kind of thing, authorised me to offer his services as secretary and treasurer, if he were not here in time to offer them himself."

Mr. Claverton was understood to remark that as Mr. Twiss had a good deal of such work on his hands already, it was scarcely fair to allow him to burden himself with more: and Dr. Forbes, who was a little deaf, responded warmly,

“Quite true, sir! a most experienced man, as you say. We are all agreed I think that no one could be better fitted for the task?” The majority assented.

So far, they had been standing; but now at Gavin’s request they seated themselves around the table, and proceeded to arrange the details of their scheme. Most of them being business men to whom time was valuable, they discussed point after point with great rapidity, delayed occasionally by having to explain some matter at length to Dr. Forbes, who was more benevolent than practical. Their work was almost complete when Richard Twiss arrived, and the information he brought proved the necessity for immediate action. Some of those present left at once to relieve the more urgent cases, others went to canvass for further aid—the meeting was at an end.

“I fear you have seen some distressing sights, my dear sir,” said Dr. Forbes laying a sympathetic hand on Twiss’s arm. There was some cause for his remark: Richard’s face was as white as the papers he held, and his eyes wore

still that look of extreme terror that tells of close acquaintance with what is horrible. He had risen to leave—he, Dr. Forbes, and Mr. Claverton, alone remained with Gavin—but he now dropped back into his chair as though his limbs had suddenly lost their strength.

“It was sickening,” he said, with a shudder, “absolutely sickening: I hope to God, I may never see anything so awful again! I thought the newspaper accounts were exaggerated, but they give a very faint idea of the reality. I can’t get the sight out of my mind. And I have had bad news since I left the mill. I found a note at my office telling me of my brother Alan’s death.”

“Dear, dear, dear!” ejaculated Dr. Forbes. “Was he at the Cape?”

“No, he seems to have been on his way home: he went ashore at Tenerife, and died there.”

“Can he have gone to Tenerife in the hope of meeting John Corbett, I wonder? they were such friends, those two. But he must have heard of Corbett’s death. Dear, dear, dear!”

Well, Mr. Wishart, we will not trespass further on your time."

Gavin went with them to the hall.

Mr. Claverton was the last to leave. Standing on the doorstep while he fastened his coat, he said, "Dr. Forbes misunderstood my remark about Richard Twiss and the treasurership."

"Very evidently," laughed Gavin.

"And I heard you dissent from his opinion: why did you do that?"

"Because I thought you knew much more about the matter than he did. He looks ill: Richard Twiss, I mean."

"Yes, he does. They are not a strong family. Andrew Twiss, the father, had heart complaint. I suppose consumption killed Alan, poor fellow; it astonished me to hear of his death to-day, because Mr. Anderson believed him to be dead some months ago. You remember him, of course?"

"Perfectly. I too heard a rumour of his death: it must have been unfounded."

"A sad career, his," said Mr. Claverton. "It is a pity the father did not transmit some of his

moral qualities to his sons. Andrew Twiss had an extraordinary reputation for integrity : you are too young to remember it, but I never knew another man as universally esteemed. I should think that in four-fifths of the cases that have come to my knowledge of private disagreements settled by arbitration, he was the arbitrator. I don't know that Richard has altogether sustained his father's reputation, although your late relative had such implicit confidence in him : and as to Alan—we know what he was, eh ?”

“ Yes,” answered Gavin thus appealed to, “ we know what he was.”

When Mr. Claverton had gone, Gavin returned to the room he had left. He stood for some minutes staring into vacancy, with eyes that looked as those of Richard Twiss had looked, dreadfully afraid. He felt shaken, unnerved ; his hands, even, were noticeably unsteady.

“ ‘ Peter began to curse and to swear,’ ” he repeated to himself in a whisper. “ I feel like cursing and swearing. How many more times

shall I have to acquiesce in that lie? Each time is to be the last, and yet I do it again. What was it they said? He went ashore at Tenerife in the hope of meeting Corbett. He did, I know he did! Merciful God! he is dead, and the other is dead, and at last I am safe! But the insane folly of it all! For £50! I, who was to have thousands a few weeks later: I, who can fling away hundreds to-day on a few burnt creatures: I, to be in desperation then for £50, and to do a mean dishonourable thing and to have the blot of it soak down through all my life! And I can't wipe it out! I have given the money hundreds of times over—I have hunted out other debt driven wretches and helped them—I have done every single thing I can think of—and after all, some one brings the whole thing back upon me, and I have to lie over again, and curse myself, curse myself, curse myself!” His breath came in quick short gasps like sobs. “God! it's not a fair thing that I should be tormented so! My life is clean enough every other way: no one can point a finger at me. I was careless and

extravagant, nothing more. And to be haunted like this ! to be driven to lie like this ! it's not fair, it's cruel, God of love !” His voice broke suddenly into a low wail, “ Mary, I can't come to you and say there is nothing in my life I am ashamed of. I shall always have to think *What if you knew !* I seem nearly perfect to you, and I daren't let you see, I daren't let you see.” He was silent for a time : gradually he breathed more evenly, he grew calmer. He sat down, feeling rather ashamed of his hysterical outburst, and a good deal fatigued. He leaned his head back, and rested with closed eyes for some minutes, his lips moving, as he silently repeated over and over again words that seemed to act like a charm upon him. He did not say them irreverently or thoughtlessly, he really meant them.

Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am afflicted.

Forsake me not O Lord, O Lord make haste to help me.

Bring me up out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock.

Lead me in the plain path, because of my enemies.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN CAYFORD lingered in the stern of the "Curlew" until Tenerife had disappeared from view. As he watched the island, it seemed to lower itself gently into the sea until it was but a dull blue line on the horizon; then it vanished. As gradually and almost as completely, the sad experiences at Santa Cruz vanished from his mental vision. At first he thought of them all day long, with a pitying sorrow for the dead man and an eager determination to lose no time in carrying out his wishes; then the recollections lost their vividness and became infrequent; finally, as England came into sight, his own plans began to re-assert their claims upon his notice, and to dwarf every other consideration. The more he thought of them, the more impatient he grew of the hindrance to their accomplishment which the settlement of Alan's affairs might involve. It

was a relief to him to find on inquiry that Mr. Anderson, to whom Alan's papers were to be shewn, was travelling on the Continent and likely to be absent for several days. Delay was thus forced upon him. At present he could do no more than acquaint Richard Twiss with his brother's death : having done this, he dismissed the matter from his mind.

It was on the day following the disastrous fire at Cooper's Mill, that John Cayford found himself at liberty to carry out his own projects ; and as he moved away from Mr. Anderson's office, revolving plans for the fulfilment of his wishes, he was seen and recognized by a young lady who came from the very spot round which his hopes centered—Miss Kate Ferris, niece of the Established Church clergyman at Feldrossan.

Her monthly visits to Glasgow, broke the monotony of Kate's life in the Feldrossan Manse. She had left her home in England ten years before this story opens, in order to reside with and care for her father's only surviving brother, the Rev. Matthew Ferris. She was

then an inexperienced girl, aged eighteen years; that she was still inexperienced in many matters was perhaps inevitable, since her sphere of life was this small fishing village on the Ayrshire coast. There she devoted herself to the interests of her uncle and his parishioners, and tried to forget certain visions of great achievements to come, that had glorified her youth.

Formerly, she and her uncle went into town together; she to collect her household supplies, and he to maintain his acquaintance with old friends and attend to his few money matters. Of late years, increasing age and the infirmities connected therewith made Mr. Ferris dread the fatigue entailed by the journey to and from town. Kate therefore undertook his business in addition to her own: "lifted" his stipend for him when it was due, paid his bills, and chatted with his old friends. She was not unwilling to leave him on these occasions, because Mary Forester, a younger niece of his who spent much of her time at the Manse, was so gentle so sweet so companionable a girl, that Mr. Ferris never wearied of her society.

Kate had not attempted to discover why it was that these days spent in town were more dear to her than any others in the year. She fretted for them till they came, enjoyed them fully while they passed, and dwelt on the memory of them when they were gone. Life at Feldrossan seemed to her so small, so narrow. No one knew how the girl chafed over the duties that occupied her. True, they were varied enough to have satisfied most minds. There were household affairs to be ordered, linen and clothes to be mended, letters to be written for her uncle, and books and papers to be read to him: also the garden must be tended, and fruit and flowers with sympathy and advice, carried to this parishioner or that. Enough scope here, surely, for the most vigorous young lady? Kate found it insufficient. Her former life had been passed in a great town, a centre of ceaseless activity, where she had studied and brooded and dreamed through her youth of the great things to be done by her when her opportunity came. Her uncle asked her to live with him, and she thought her

opportunity had come. Exactly what she expected she did not know: but year after year her horizon instead of widening seemed to narrow itself, her mental powers instead of developing became to her thinking dwarfed. Her aspirations had been so great, her attainments were so dismally small. All the philosophy which she drank in greedily from the works of Mr. Emerson and Mr. Carlyle, did not prevent her bursting into bitter tears sometimes, when, after having had her sensibilities wounded in a dozen places, she would make some such discovery as that the incorrigible Bella had committed an unpardonable sin in mixing too much dripping with the oateakes! The tears were shed in private, of course; Kate stormed at herself for her want of sense—crying at a trifle, when real troubles found her tearless.

Such a climax as this, was invariably reached near the end of the month; but her day in town brought comfort to the girl. From the moment in which she entered the crowded streets, her own life with its over-familiar sur-

roundings was lost sight of. She forgot her humiliations, she forgot to loathe and despise herself; she became engrossed in the study of others. Her own personality was thrust upon her notice every day in the month save this, when she could study other personalities. Every face she passed had a history written on it for her to decipher. There was no scope for her imagination in the Feldrossan faces and lives and dwellings, the details of which she already knew too intimately: here everything was unknown, and therefore intensely interesting.

Having noted down her uncle's commissions on this particular morning, she added to her list Mary Forester's requirements as the cousins walked together to the Manse gate.

"One skein of the pink and two of the apple-green filoselle, please," said Mary, as she broke a dusky rose from its tree, and fastened it into Kate's dress. "This rose is a charm, to bring you back from your beloved town: I believe some day you will get so fond of the dirty place that you will never leave it again. Don't be

away long to-day, dear, and be sure to tell me if you see any one we know."

"Why Mary, who am I likely to see, except the tradesmen? And how can I possibly come back before the usual afternoon train?"

Kate's voice had a touch of asperity in it, as she said this. Linked to each other though these two girls were, by ties of relationship and of love, there were constant little frictions between them. They lived much in each other's company, but they had little in common. To Kate, life seemed a very tragic thing, its sorrows were always before her: she held decided opinions on many subjects: she neither spoke nor acted without definite intention. To Mary, life was one long ray of sunlight, wherein lay infinite possibilities of finding and giving enjoyment: opinions seemed to her tiresome things which it was a ludicrous waste of time to form; as to intention in speech or action, she was entirely innocent of it. She had her little griefs, of course, and wept over them copiously; but her radiance was soon restored to her—

whence Kate deduced that Mary's feelings were shallow, and allowed herself an unexpressed sense of satisfaction in the greater depth of her own. Each misjudged and misunderstood the other. On the present occasion, Mary thought "Kate is in one of her touchy moods to-day." Raising herself on tiptoe, to kiss her cousin, she opened the gate for her without further remark. With the soft pressure of Mary's lips upon her cheek and the scent of Mary's rose surrounding her, Kate walked up the road to Garleigh Station which was two miles distant. She enjoyed the walk—every step she took brought her nearer to town: she enjoyed the railway ride, leaning back in the carriage with closed eyes, while her thoughts, travelling more swiftly than the train, anticipated her arrival. Yet when the journey was over, she hesitated to enter the dirty prosaic streets which had never failed hitherto to yield her the exhilaration she craved. This day, her depression of spirits was so extreme, that it seemed as though the usual remedy must be inadequate. She feared to grasp the pleasure within her reach,

lest it should prove an added disappointment. As she stepped out into the crowded thoroughfare, she said to herself half petulantly, "Even the days in town are all alike: there never is any change!"

To-day, there was a change. The first person upon whom Kate's glance fell, was one she had imagined to be thousands of miles away. His face was turned from her, and she, irresistibly impelled, followed him, to assure herself that she was not mistaken in his identity. He walked slowly, pausing presently before a shop window: Kate stood aloof to watch him. Her eyesight was keen: she readily satisfied herself that it was indeed John Cayford upon whom she looked, yet she seemed unable to stir from the spot, a spell was upon her holding her there. Although her gaze was directed toward him, she did not see him now; she saw nothing outwardly. Her inward vision, however, was doubly clear. Slowly a mist seemed to lift itself away from her past life, and a truth, hitherto shrouded, lay revealed. The moments of time that passed were few, but they were

epoch-making moments, such as come to all of us.

We shrink from examining our highest joys and deepest griefs, save in an environment of calm and quiet. When some one in the passing crowd pushed against Kate, the material touch roused her to a sense of her surroundings: she moved away to attend to her errands, saying to herself, "I will think over this to-night."

Where was now the close scrutiny with which she had been wont to examine the faces she passed in the streets? Her eyes were dilated it is true, but she was unconscious of the passers by. She walked rapidly forward, her mind filled with one thought—He has come back! These words rang in her ears, drowning the tumult and din of the city: they appeared to be traced in glowing characters over her own sharp pencillings, when she glanced down at the list in her hand. The grocer who took her orders, did not know how nearly he had received this same sentence instead of a request for coffee and tea: and the woman who served her with silks and watched her intent study of

shades, would have been amazed to see Kate open the parcel, later on, to assure herself that she really had executed her cousin's order.

When her business was finished it was time for her to return to the station. She never doubted that she would find John Cayford there. This was the most convenient train by which he could travel to Garleigh, and of course Feldrossan was his destination. She congratulated herself that she was now prepared to meet him with outward composure: yet when she reached the platform her heart beat so violently as almost to suffocate her. He was not there. Twice her eager eyes searched the group by the train; it did not contain him. She turned away with a sickening sense of disappointment. Cruel, cruel of her eyes to have deceived her, and caused her to dwell for hours in a fool's paradise. She had time to think several very bitter thoughts, before a hand touched her shoulder and a familiar voice said in her ear, "What good luck brings you to town to-day, Kate? Are you glad to see me home again?" There was little doubt as to Kate's gladness!

CHAPTER III.

OUR endowments, considered apart, may be unalloyed blessings: but, qualified as each of them is by other gifts, they often become productive of pain rather than pleasure. Kate Ferris possessed a vivid imagination, but her power of sympathy was not less acute; and when, with impish cruelty, imagination stirred her too ready sympathies into activity, their owner suffered much unnecessary distress.

To-day she had been dazzled with illusive visions of happiness: she was now to be tormented with ideas as illusive—suggested to her by the air of gravity and abstraction which settled upon her companion after she had answered the eager questions asked by him as soon as they were seated in the train now carrying them to Garleigh.

“Give me news Kate. I am hungry for it. Remember that I have been away for seven years, and tell me all about everything.”

"Where shall I begin?" she asked.

"With Feldrossan: has it changed?" This was not the question he longed to utter, but it would lead to it.

"Surely you have forgotten the place, John; did it alter all the years that you lived in it? Stay, the schoolhouse has been renovated I think; and certainly the old flour mill at Leith Point has been washed away by the sea, since you left. Otherwise there is no difference."

"And the people?"

"They are all seven years older."

"Which means—?"

"That some who were little more than children, are grown up: and others who used never to know a day's illness are rheumatic: and a few more are deplorably deaf. Also, there have of course been births, marriages, and—deaths." She lowered her voice at the last word, for John's only sister had died recently.

"How are they at the Manse, Kate?"

"I believe you will think Uncle more changed than any one. He has aged very much lately; he is not so active as he used to be."

“And Mary?” He waited anxiously for her answer.

“You will think her altered too, perhaps. She is very beautiful, and very sweet. Everyone loves Mary,” added Kate involuntarily.

“Then she cannot be at all altered. Does she live with you still?”

“She is with us just now. She gives us what time she can spare from her cousins in Glasgow.”

“How good of her!” he said, so fervently, that Kate looked at him in astonishment.

“Well I don’t know: I imagine these newcomers can hardly be so dear to her as we are. Why did you not let us know that you were coming, John?”

“Because I could not. My arrangements were very hurried at the last; until a day or two before I started, I was uncertain whether I should get away. Besides, I wanted to have the pleasure of surprising you all.”

“It is a delightful surprise. We have spoken of you so often lately; wondering what you were doing, and when we should see you

again. Can't you imagine the astonishment and joy in Uncle's face and Mary's, when they see you walk up to the Manse? But *how* you will miss Alice!" Again Kate's voice sank almost to a whisper.

Her companion did not hear her; his mind was full of the welcome awaiting him. Noting his silence and preoccupation, Kate set herself to divine his thoughts, and at once concluded that sad memories of his dead sister must be pressing upon him. How could it be otherwise? Alice had been so much to him; his intimate companion till he left home, his faithful correspondent thereafter—the blank made by her absence must be terrible. Kate looked at him with eyes too full of pity to discern anything but sorrow in his countenance: she moved away to the further end of the carriage, that her presence might seem less of an intrusion on his grief. The railway journey appeared interminable to her, and yet she dreaded its conclusion; for, if the scenery unfolded before them as they hurried South were potent to rouse memories of Alice, what a crowd of remi-

niscences must be stirred at every step of the familiar road lying between Garleigh and Feldomossan. She recalled her own desolation of spirit after the death of her favourite brother; such a desolation must now have fallen upon her companion, and she was powerless to lessen it. "These things are worse for men than for women," concluded Kate, "because we can speak about them, and they can't." By the time they reached Garleigh, she had worked herself into an agony of apprehension lest Barron the station master who greeted John Cayford with warmth, should make some jarring allusion to his bereavement. She was amazed at the readiness with which Barron's remarks upon topics of local interest were responded to; afterwards it occurred to her that this self-control was admirable, but that strong natures, most capable of exercising it, were also those most capable of suffering keenly.

It would have been less painful for this imaginative young lady to have walked with bare feet along the flinty road from Garleigh to the Manse, than it was for her to traverse it with

feet uncut, and a heart that bled for her companion at every step she took. "Here," she thought, "is the old dyke Alice loved because it was so picturesque, how he will hate to see that it has been rebuilt and is hideous. And here is the very spot at which Alice always made us stop to admire Ailsa Craig. He must remember: will he stop now, I wonder?"—she looked at him apprehensively, but he walked straight on—"He cannot bear to stop," thought Kate. And thus did she torment herself the whole way home. Had she been less engrossed with thoughts of him, she might have reflected on the lightness of heart with which we weave associations of those we love into our closest surroundings; heedless that a time may come when death shall divide, or estrangement alienate—and leave us environed with such sad or bitter memories, that we cannot bear to look upon the landscape or listen to the music or pluck the flowers which once were sweet remembrancers.

The two pedestrians reached at last a bend in the road where, being on an eminence, they

could see Feldrossan clearly. The Manse was the nearest building to them; beyond it was the cottage which for years John and Alice had called their home. When Kate saw it, she turned impulsively to her companion with her hand out-stretched. Her eyes were filled with tears, her voice was unsteady as she said: "Oh, John! it must be so hard for you to see that house again, and know that Alice is not there."

He took her hand, and looked blankly at her for a moment. His expression seemed to her to indicate dumb grief: in reality, he was shocked and amazed. Scarcely a thought of Alice had crossed his mind, so entirely had his remembrance of her been dwarfed by his remembrance of another. Kate's imagination had misled her utterly. His gravity and pre-occupation were caused by thoughts of the living, not of the dead. The landscape, the familiar landmarks, had suggested to him Mary Forester, not Alice. He saw the dyke that had been rebuilt, and thought of the days long passed when it had been covered with moss and bluebells, bracken and heather, and when

he had transplanted many ferns from it to die a lingering death in that corner of the Manse garden which Mary called her own. He saw the spot at which Kate expected him to stop, and remembered only Mary's admiration of the view from it. When the bend in the road was reached, he saw nothing but the Manse where Mary lived. He was thankful that Kate walked on without seeming to expect any response to her sympathetic words. He felt himself to be a hypocrite: of course he should have been thinking only of his sister, and Mary had altogether filled his mind.

Mr. Ferris, impatient for Kate's return, was standing at the Manse gate that he might catch the first glimpse of her. He prided himself on his long-sightedness, but when he saw her familiar figure in the distance, he was puzzled because she was not alone. Who could she have with her? He adjusted his eyeglasses and peered through them, with the result that roses beside him became abnormally large, while all further objects grew misty. Then he bent his head and peered over his glasses, and

this time he recognised Kate's companion. He was not very much astonished. He had lived through many surprises, and now accepted the unexpected with a calmness that rather aggravated his juniors. His niece and John Cayford came toward him with smiling faces. "It is as it should be," he muttered to himself, "they make a handsome couple. Well, well, I shall have to learn to do without Kate."

The welcome received at the Manse was after all incomplete; Mary Forester was not there. She and her uncle had been paying calls in the afternoon, and had found one lady so poorly and dispirited, that Mary had offered stay and take tea with her. When tea was over at the Manse, and there was some cessation in the rapid outpouring of information by which the seven years of absence must be bridged over, John Cayford proposed that he should walk to Mrs. Melvin's cottage, and bring Mary home.

"Ay, lad, do," said Mr. Ferris. "You and I, Kate, will see to our accounts while he is gone. Draw up the blind a little higher, John; my old eyes need all the light they can get."

John raised the blind, and wheeled the minister's chair nearer to the window; then he handed him the newspaper he had brought from town. Mr. Ferris pushed it away. "Duty before pleasure, sir," he said severely. "Don't put temptation near me, I have work to do."

Nevertheless, when Kate came into the parlour a few minutes later, her uncle was engrossed with the paper. She was not sorry to find him occupied, but she wondered that he could become interested in anything so trivial on such a night as this. She laid aside her writing materials with a sense of relief. Her thoughts drifted back to that supreme moment in the day, when she had become conscious that a new and wonderful feeling stirred within her heart. She did not want to look at it closely: there was not time yet, at any moment she might be disturbed. But she let herself be absorbed by it. It was as though she stood with closed eyes in a flood of sunshine, enjoying to the full its thrilling glow and warmth, and yet not daring to look up into the blinding glory.

An hour later, her uncle finished his exhaustive study of the newspaper; he had read even the advertisement columns. He tossed the sheet to one side and saw Kate.

“Dear me, child! where have you been? I have been waiting for you to help me with the accounts.”

“I am ready, Uncle; I thought you were busy.”

“Busy! not at all, I was merely glancing at the paper: there is nothing in it, nothing whatever. Shall we set to work now?”

“Yes Uncle,” said Kate gently.

CHAPTER IV.

THE turnpike road that passed through Feldrossan, continued by the sea for many miles until it reached Stranraer. Just beyond the village, a high wall to the right of the road, surrounded the Parish Church and graveyard; and further on, there were a few isolated cottages. They stood at irregular intervals, and had a depressing suggestion of failure about them; they looked as though they had strayed out from Feldrossan with the vain hope of uniting it to the next village, which lay a few miles further South. These cottages had been built without any attempt at ornamentation and were indeed positively ugly: each of them seemed to raise its two chimney stacks upwards in mute protest against the grandeur and beauty of form lavished on the outlines of Ailsa, Arran, or Cantyre. The most dejected looking cottage belonged to Mrs. Melvin, at

whose tea table Mary Forester presided this afternoon. Mrs. Melvin was old, her eyes were dim, her complexion colourless, and her steps languid. She wore an obtrusive air of resignation; her eyebrows were invariably elevated, and the corners of her mouth depressed. She thought the worst of every one, and was rather aggravated when her gloomy forebodings were not realised.

"You can stay to tea, if you like, Mary," she said ungraciously. "There *was* some tea bread in the cupboard, but no doubt Janet has made away with it, as usual."

"Oh no, Mrs. Melvin! I am sure Janet would not take it without leave," cried Mary, who could not bear to think ill of any one. The cupboard was opened and Janet's character vindicated. Had the cakes vanished, Mrs. Melvin might have been faintly cheerful; as it was, she raised her eyebrows higher than before, and observed that every piece on the plate looked smaller than it had done last time.

Mary had exercised a good deal of self-denial in offering to stay with Mrs. Melvin: she

wanted to be home when Kate returned, Kate might have seen some one, or heard something interesting. Mary was at present living in a state of restless expectation. It was at no time pleasant for her to be with this old lady. Those who make ill-natured remarks never guess what acute suffering they inflict on the sensitiveness of a charitable hearer. Usually Mary contrived to infuse a little of her own over-flowing love into every one with whom she came in contact; but Mrs. Melvin seemed love-proof. To-day her tongue was more venomous than usual, and after enduring its stings for two hours, Mary rose to go, her nerves quivering and her tender heart outraged.

“Oh—oh—oh!” she gasped, as she closed the cottage door behind her, “how *can* people think such wicked things, when God has given them such a beautiful place to live in?” To talk scandal in a dirty town, was perhaps excusable; but how any one could live within view of Arran, and be spiteful, passed Mary’s comprehension. It will be seen that her comprehension was exceedingly limited in some

directions. She was twenty-five years old, and so carefully had her guileless soul been nurtured, that lies were the blackest form of iniquity with which she had any practical acquaintance. The hints, inuendoes, and evil suggestions poured forth by Mrs. Melvin, affected her as fear affected her—making her heart beat quick and her cheeks burn; filling her mind with a vague dread of she knew not what; causing her to shrink away in painful terror from an intensity of darkness which she could not fathom. She clasped her little hands tight about her throat to ease the aching pain there; and hurried away from Mrs. Melvin's cottage, that she might be free from the suffocating atmosphere of suspicion. When she reached the churchyard, she entered it, and flew with eager steps to a grave in the far corner, before which she knelt, sobbing out her grief. "Oh, Alice, dear! you always believed in people; you always said God wanted us to think lovingly of them even when they do wrong. It isn't true that they are all so wicked. You were good, dear; you were

good. Oh, why did you go away from me?"

Her words, her thoughts were incoherent: gradually her sobbing spent itself, her tears ceased, her sorrow became less acute. There were roses blooming all round the grave; as her sight grew clearer she saw that one and another was withered, and began tenderly to detach the faded flowers. She was thus occupied, when John Cayford, who had seen her enter the churchyard while he was yet at some distance, came near her. The mossy turf had deadened the sound of his footsteps; she was not aware of his presence until, having finished her work, she rose to her feet, turned away from the grave, and saw him. Instantly she was by his side, clinging to his arm.

"John, my dear, dear John—you have come back at last!"

He looked down into her face. It was so sweet, so pure, so child-like: the eyes shining with happiness, the lashes still wet with tears. Was there another face in all the world, as lovely?

“And it is seven long years since I saw you, Mary!”

“Yes” she said, “seven long years. When you went away, Alice and I thought the time would never pass. Oh, if she were here now, John—if she were only here! We talked so often about you. So often we walked to the corner mile-stone, and half persuaded ourselves that you were coming down the Feldrossan road. She gave me a great many messages for you when you should come home.”

“You must tell me all of them, Mary.”

“I will,” she said, “I will. I wanted to write to you, but I could not. You did not think hard things of me, because I sent no letter?”

“I never had a hard thought of you in my life, Mary.”

“I knew Uncle and Kate could tell you everything so much better than I. I tried to write, but it was all so terribly dark and sad, and words seem such cold things in a great trouble. It was so sudden, too. I did not know she was dying until she asked the doctor

herself how long she had to live, and he told her ‘only a few hours.’ Think what it must be to have such a thing said to you! It was the evening, and she asked me to stay with her. I lay down beside her, and we talked together. She said that she only wanted to live for your sake, and that when you came home I must be all to you that she would have been: I will, John, if I can I will. Then she spoke of heaven, and I scarcely dared breathe lest she should stop. We were so peaceful and happy, it seemed as if life were beginning, not ending. The hours flew fast, the candles burned dim, the day broke. She would say a few words and then rest, and then speak again: and when she spoke, I feared to lose a syllable—and when she rested, I thought over all she had said. So her dear voice grew fainter and fainter, and I heard more and more plainly the dull thud of the waves on the beach outside: and presently I could hear nothing but the waves. Then I knew that she would never speak to me again; never, never, never!”

“Mary, you must not cry so, dear; you must

not, it is not right. This is not the welcome Alice would have had you give me."

She dashed away the tears, and tried to steady her quivering lips.

"I have missed her so much, John."

"My poor little girl, I know you must have. Did Kate not help you?"

"Oh yes, but she is older: and then—she is so clever, I always think she is laughing at me."

"Well, Mary, you have me now."

"Yes" she said, with a long sigh of satisfaction, "I have you now."

They left the churchyard, and by common consent crossed the road, preferring to walk home by the shore path, which though rougher and longer was more solitary. They lingered on the way, and were unconscious that they lingered.

When they reached the Manse gate, Kate raised her eyes from her work and saw them. The brilliant colours of the sunset had faded out of the sky; but a pale yellow light was diffused around, which seemed to illuminate

every object with startling clearness. The expression of perfect happiness in Mary's face was good to look upon; when Kate saw it, her own lips parted with a sympathetic smile. Then her glance wandered to Mary's companion, and her smile vanished. She read more than perfect happiness in that face.

"Kate," said Mr. Ferris, pushing toward her a paper covered with figures, "I can't make your reckoning and mine agree. Do you think you can have made a mistake?"

Kate turned her head from the window, and looked at him vacantly.

"I shall know when they come in," she said.

They came in before Mr. Ferris had time to reflect that Kate's answer was strange.

"Oh, Uncle," cried Mary, "is it not delightful? How surprised you must have been. I think you were very kind to let John bring me home. What are you and Kate doing? Accounts? Who could look at bills to-night!"

"My dear," said Mr. Ferris reprovingly, "these things must be attended to. Do you see your mistake, Kate?"

“Of course she sees her mistake,” cried Mary gaily. “Say ‘yes,’ Kate, quick, and let us put the horrid papers away.”

Kate’s “yes” was almost inaudible, and did not refer to the figures at all, but it satisfied her uncle.

CHAPTER V.

THERE were customs at the Manse, which, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, altered not. Every evening at half past nine, an exodus took place from the parlour. Mr. Ferris went to his study, and was supposed to work for an hour or two: the young ladies went to their rooms, and were supposed to lose no time in going to rest. Such had indeed been the habits of all three in former days, but they no longer used their time as they had been wont to use it. Mr. Ferris did not study in the evening, although his lamp was always lit and his books and writing materials placed in readiness: instead, he sat and ruminated for an indefinite period with indefinite results. Generally a haze stole over his mind, through which thoughts presented themselves slowly and vaguely while the large eight-day clock ticked a monotonous accompaniment. The striking of the clock, or

a sensation of cramp in his limbs, would rouse him after an interval; and he would rise and turn out the light, shaking his head and saying, "Well, well, well!" in a profoundly regretful tone, as though it were a sad thing that such profitable meditation should have an end put to it. Kate, who lit the lamp at night and attended to it next morning, was quite aware that the pen and paper were unused and the books undisturbed: yet, as the proper hour approached, she never failed to say, "You will want to study now, Uncle?" and he as invariably responded, "Yes, child, certainly."

To-night from her seat in the window, she stole constant glances at the clock, waiting with feverish impatience for the time when her uncle's lamp must be lit. Although she longed to be alone, it might seem strange if she absented herself too soon on such an occasion as this. She held a worn sock in her hand, and bestowed so close a care on the darning of it, that Mary looked at her with wondering disapproval. Surely it was neither respectful to her uncle, nor courteous to John, that Kate should

seat herself away from the rest of them, and work, and take so little notice. So little notice ! Had Mary known it, there was not a word spoken nor a movement made, of which Kate's senses failed to inform her. Never had she been more conscious of her surroundings, never more acutely aware of the inflections in her companions' tones and the direction of their glances. All the while, her needle flashed back and forth, darting under this strand and over that with amazing rapidity and precision. Seven times down the row and seven times back, the gleaming point appeared and disappeared : Kate's excited fancy saw it drag out a syllable from beneath every thread—"Do you see your mistake, Kate? Do you see your mistake, Kate?"

The time came at last. She prepared the study, and returned to make the usual suggestion about work. Mr. Ferris deliberated.

"Well not to-night, Kate, I think. John will perhaps come and talk with me for a while. There is no occasion for you two to stay up longer."

So good-nights were said, and the cousins went upstairs with their arms linked about each other's waists and their hearts widely sundered. They kissed each other according to custom, and entered their respective rooms. Peace reigned without.

And what within?

Mary carried with her the newspaper that Mr. Ferris had thrown aside earlier in the evening. She was so conscious of her own intention in taking it, that she had blushed quite guiltily and looked apprehensively at her companions as she lifted it from the parlour table. Her movement was unobserved, however; and when she found herself alone, she hurried to her window, through which sufficient daylight still streamed to make her independent of a candle.

She searched carefully down each column. It might have been supposed that she was intensely concerned in foreign affairs, the doings of Parliament still assembled, and topics of more local interest. Truth to tell, she was searching only for one name; the appearance of which in print on two or three occasions, had

invested Journalism with a solemn dignity in Mary's eyes. Twice during her examination of the paper, her heart began to beat quickly and her face to glow : she found the name of Gavin Wishart, Esq., in the list of guests in the launch of the S. S. "Karoo," and from another column she learned that he was one of "a few generous and philanthropic men" who were starting a relief fund for the sufferers from the Cooper's Mill Fire. She laid the paper down, and sighed ; "How noble he is !" she thought.

Then she divested herself of her dress, loosened her golden hair, and knelt at the window to read her Bible and say her prayers. It seemed very difficult to fix her attention on the verses before her, her mind kept wandering to the launch and the Relief Fund. In real distress, she put aside her Bible and tried to pray—to discover presently that she was in the midst of an imaginary conversation with Gavin Wishart. Startled and ashamed, Mary pressed her hands tightly over her eyes, and began to pray audibly in a low whisper. She thanked God for having made such a good man as

Gavin; she prayed that he might always be noble and generous and beloved; that he might always be prosperous; that his prosperity might make him love God more; and—that it might perhaps be true—that—that—— Mary rose to her feet hurriedly with a sudden burst of sobs. “Oh me! I am not praying rightly at all. Why am I so wicked: how can God forgive me?” Half an hour later she was asleep.

In the next room, Kate too knelt before her open window. She had knelt there for an hour or more, perfectly motionless. Her hands were clasped before her on the window sill, her face was very white, her eyes were wide open and gazed upon the sea. The golden colour had died out of the sky leaving it grey and dreary. The sea looked desolate; its waves lifted themselves listlessly and sank upon the shore, as though every movement were an effort. Kate was not thinking about them, nor about anything. Her mind seemed to have wearied itself out, with the iteration of the sentence that

had accompanied her darning. Her faculties were torpid, numb. The monotonous sound of voices in the study below, confused itself with the monotonous dash of the waves without. After a while, the sound of voices ceased, doors were closed and bolted, the house was shut up for the night. Still Kate knelt at her window.

Presently, she felt a splash upon her hand. She looked up to the sky, the stars were shining down on her: she touched her eyes, they were wet with tears. Kate laughed: then she caught her breath in sudden terror—the laugh had such a dreadful sound in it.

All at once, a flood of thought was let loose, pouring itself out in low-tone soliloquy.

“It was too good: of course it could not be for me. I might have known that; oh! I might have known that. Why are some so rich in love, while others have to go starving all their lives? Hunger hurts—hurts—hurts: perhaps one can get accustomed to it, in time . . .

“I have been insane. I might have thought

of this, it is so natural. She was here five years before I came: she and Alice and he, were always together. I have been thinking of her as a child. And all the time I thought—I thought he cared for me. Does one always find out the truth, too late? I have been mistaken, I have been inordinately vain: I never knew before that I was vain! Oh Mary! you could have spared it *so* easily. Every one loves you: you can make yourself love any one. I cannot. I have loved him all these years. I never knew it until to-day: and now, it stretches itself back through all these years. It is here, alive, and I can't kill it. I would strangle it if I could, but I can't, I can't!" She wrung her hands, impotently. . .

"Well, there is no use now, in looking back. What am I to do? What am I to do? What *do* people do, when they are shewn heaven, and then turned away from it? There is work, of course. And I shall have to see this going on, and listen to their confidences, and make opportunities for them. . ."

She felt a sharp stab of pain in her shoulder;

and dragged herself wearily to her feet, realising how stiff and cold she was.

“Rheumatism !” she said, with another mirthless laugh. “An aching shoulder and an aching heart, and myself to blame for both of them.”

She struck a light and looked at her watch : it was nearly two o’clock. With her candle in her hand, she pushed open the door between her room and Mary’s. Mary was asleep. For a long time Kate stood and watched her. As she looked upon the lovely face with its halo of golden hair, the hardness died out from her own features.

“You are good, dear !” she whispered, “you deserve happiness. You are not strong enough to endure hunger ; it is right that you should always have love about you.” She bent down to touch her cousin’s forehead with her lips, then she stole silently back to her own room.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE had been silence in the study for some time after the gentlemen entered it. Mr. Ferris, having adjusted the lamp so that its light should illuminate the face of his companion, had seated himself where he could obtain a good view of that face. He loved to look upon it; he was eager to note what differences had been wrought in it during these seven years of absence. He nodded his head several times in mute approval of the firmly closed lips and square jaw, the clear grey eyes and straight dark eyebrows upon which his gaze rested. At length he spoke; and it was then that Kate heard the monotonous sound of voices mingle with the monotonous sound of the surf.

"It contents me to see you here, lad," he said.

"Indeed, sir, it contents me to be here."

“Ah! You were not always so easily contented.”

John looked up with a good-humoured smile.

“Have you not forgiven me yet, for going to Melbourne? I thought my success would justify me.”

Mr. Ferris shook his head. He had been John Cayford’s guardian for many years, and the young man had only once acted in direct opposition to his advice: it was to this solitary instance of opposition that the thoughts of both reverted now.

“What are your plans, lad; have you come home to settle here?”

“No indeed, sir, it would be utter folly to leave Melbourne at present. I have done much, but I mean to do a great deal more. I do not think of taking a longer holiday than four months, or six at the most.”

Mr. Ferris compressed his lips: he was disappointed and vexed to be thus reminded that his advice was no longer wanted.

“Well, well,” he said, “gang your ain gait, lad. It is of no use for me to interfere. You

know my opinion of those who make haste to get rich. I sometimes wonder what is the use of our experience: it comes too late to be of much service to ourselves; it is bought dearly enough, God knows; and when we offer it, young folks think nothing of it. They prefer to burn their own fingers and break their own hearts, rather than trust to what we tell them."

"But this is not a case of heart breaking, I hope, sir," said John, in a conciliatory tone. "I suppose, when you left Dalnock to come to Fiddrossan, the increased stipend had some attractions, even for you. You know I should never have made more than £200 a year in Fergusson's office, and see what my income is now."

"I wonder you troubled to come back to us," remarked the old man testily. He had prognosticated much evil as the result of John's departure from Scotland, and it was a little aggravating that not one circumstance had occurred of which he could say, "This is just what I told you would happen." John leaned forward, and laid his hand on the minister's.

"Sir, I have come back for a wife."

Every shade of ill humour, vanished instantly from Mr. Ferris' countenance: his interest in love affairs was as keen now as it had ever been.

"Right, lad, right," he said. "It is time you were settled: all young people should marry. Why did you not think of it before?"

"I have thought of it for years. I had it in view when I went out to Melbourne, but I could not do more than think of it until I was independent. If I had had a wife to support, I could have risked nothing, my hands would have been tied: as it was, I risked a good deal. I stand now on firm ground, but there were three or four years of uncertainty. You know who I have come home for, Mr. Ferris?"

"Yes, lad, I suppose so: I must make up my mind to do without her. I am sharp-sighted in these matters, John. I thought I saw something of this before you went away, and to-day, when you two came in together, I guessed how it would end. You might search the wide world through, and you would not find a nobler girl than she is."

"I know that, I know that," assented the lover.

"Clear headed, quick witted, with tact, good sense, cleverness—she is the very wife for you : I shall begin to have some confidence in your judgment again. I declare I don't know anything that she cannot do. She manages my affairs and those of the parish, and they never were so well managed before. It is more than you deserve that some one has not carried her off while you have been away drudging for wealth."

John started. "Do you think there is any one else that she cares for, sir?"

"No, no, lad. It is more than you deserve, but I believe she loves you : I have my eyes open, and I can put two and two together. I had sooner see her married to you than to any other man, but I shall miss her sadly."

"Not for long, sir. Kate is very capable is she not ? It will take time, but still I am sure she will do her very best to fill Mary's place."

"*Mary's place !*"

"Of course you think no one can fill it : yet,

in time, Kate may learn to do some of Mary's work."

"*Mary's work!*"

A long ivory paper knife which Mr. Ferris held, slid through his fingers on to the ground. He stooped to pick it up, and John thought it was this exertion that caused the old man to flush so, and look so disturbed.

"John, for whom have you come home?"

"For Mary, sir; did you not understand?"

"For Mary, for Mary! Oh lad, you are making a mistake, you should have come for Kate."

"My dear sir, I never thought of Kate, nor she of me. It has been Mary, always."

There was a prolonged pause. At length John spoke, prompted by a sudden fear.

"You do not know of any hindrance there, sir? Alice knew what I wanted; she promised to look after my interests, she told me of no one."

"No, I think not: I really don't know. These cousins of hers take up much of her time, she is often away from us. I never thought about it,

she seems such a child, to me. Lad, let me speak to you without reserve: I have been a faithful friend to you and to your father before you, I have a right to speak."

"Indeed you have, sir; say what you will."

But it was some time before Mr. Ferris found words. He was terribly disconcerted by this complete subversion of his ideas.

"John," he said at length, "I implore you not to be in too great a hurry about this. Take time, take time to think it over seriously. Mary is very beautiful, I never knew any one with a character more transparent and pure than hers: but she is child-like—she will never be anything else. You will want more from your wife than she could give you: she will be unhappy if she cannot satisfy you. She is not fitted to battle with adversity—you could not share your troubles with her: she is very sensitive—a harsh word would crush her: she is not clever—you could not lean on her judgment, or have much intellectual companionship with her. Do not suppose for a moment that I under-rate her. I love the girl dearly, I know her thoroughly:

I think I know you thoroughly, too." He paused, looking eagerly at his companion. It seemed to him that his description of Mary's character was masterly, and that his reasoning was irresistible.

"Now, sir," said John, "it is my turn to speak plainly. You may know me thoroughly, but you have not the remotest conception of my ideas about marriage. I want my wife to love *me*, and lean on *me*—not to divide her affection between me and her books, and consider her judgment superior to mine. I do not intend my wife to be crushed by harsh words, nor to battle with adversity: though, had I been as content with £200 per annum as you desired, she might have some difficulty in making both ends meet. You beg me to take time to think this matter over seriously: I have thought of it for just fifteen years, and eight of them have been spent near her. It may sound presumptuous to say so, but I believe I began to study Mary's character long before you did: it was years before you had the opportunity, Mr. Ferris. You remember that when Mary first

came to the Manse, your sister lived with you; did you not both think the child shy and timid? You did not see her as she was when she spent her time with Alice and me. Then, she was as bright and gay and happy as she could be: she was free from restraint, she was herself. After Miss Ferris was married, Mary spent more of her time with us than with you, you wished her to do so that she might not be dull. How could I help loving her, when to see her is to love her and I saw her constantly? It was because I recognised how rare a treasure she is, that I could not be content to ask her to share poverty with me: she was worthy of the best that I could get for her. I have worked seven years for my Rachel, and you speak as though I had never yet given her a serious thought. You are very confident that she cannot satisfy me, I wish I were half as confident that I can satisfy her. You seem to think all the giving is on my side, little do you know Mary and all that Mary has done for me. I scarcely know how to put it into words, yet I must make you understand. Can one live near an incarnation

of goodness and truth, and be uninspired? Mary is the inspiration of my life; everything that is good in me is drawn out and fostered by her; I owe her more than I can possibly repay. You might preach a dozen sermons, Mr. Ferris, to prove that only the pure in heart shall see God, and they would not be one-half so convincing to me as the simple fact that I *dare* not let evil take hold on my life lest I should cut myself off from Mary's love." He paused for a moment, and stood erect. "Sir, forgive me if I have seemed disrespectful; don't think that I care nothing for your opinion. I can never forget how wisely you have cared for Alice and for me. But this is a matter which I ought to decide for myself, is it not? Would you, sir, have been content to let any one choose a wife for you?"

Mr. Ferris raised himself slowly out of his chair; his limbs were a little stiff, and rising was a work of time. His forehead was wrinkled, his expression gloomy. He looked at his companion in silence for a few moments, then a gleam of fun stole into his eyes.

“Well no, lad: if you put it in that way I suppose I must admit that I would have preferred to select the lady myself. Eh, me! I seem to have a very young head on these old shoulders of mine. God bless you, John. Be off to rest: if you stay here longer I shall commit myself to some more foolish speeches, no doubt. It is late, but I daresay I shall have time for a little reading.” He looked from his watch to his books.

“I have been interrupting you,” exclaimed John, remorsefully: “will you begin work at this hour?”

“Oh, I shall not do much,” said the minister.

He went to the table, as soon as he was alone, and turned over the pamphlets that lay upon it. He had undertaken to give a lecture on China Missions in a few weeks' time; these papers contained the necessary statistics. After he had disarranged them and rearranged them, he closed the inkstand which Kate invariably left open. Then he commenced to pace slowly up and down the room, pausing at intervals to address an imaginary audience. “Brethren, we

cannot listen to these records and remain unmoved! We cannot hear of the efforts made by these noble and self-denying men, without having our own hearts stirred within us! Lives such as these, lives so pure, so holy, so true, are the inspiration—the inspiration——” his glance wandered to the chair that John Cayford had occupied, and the peroration to his lecture on Missions, faded out of his mind. “The lad is in earnest, certainly he is in earnest: I never remember to have seen him so moved before. How will it end? Can she make him happy? Eh! men are blind: why did he not choose Kate?”

His thoughts drifted back to days long past. Memory was at work, shifting away the stone that time had laid upon the grave of this old man’s one romance, loosening the shroud that for so many years had held it bound hand and foot. He lived again through that brief period of intense joy and bitter grief. “It was June, then,” he murmured, “and this is June!”

CHAPTER VII.

THE fund started for the relief of the sufferers from the fire at Cooper's Mill, was exceedingly successful. Pathetically worded appeals on its behalf were sent far and near, in which such stress was laid on the absence from town of some of the most liberal givers in Glasgow, that many who would not otherwise have troubled themselves in the matter, felt bound to assist a charity so obviously handicapped. Money flowed into the treasurer's hands from all quarters. The acknowledgments were privately made: no printed list appeared from day to day, to diminish in the smallest degree the anxiety that had been universally felt regarding the success of the fund. Later on, when the grand total was announced and details were published in the daily papers, it became evident that, in spite of their absence from town, "the most liberal givers" had been applied to

and had responded; and a slightly injured sensation was experienced by some who thought that money had been extracted from them under false pretences. The printed list gave rise to those criticisms of the amounts given, and comparisons between the gifts and the incomes of the givers, which such lists seem inevitably to inspire. A curious regard we show to Charity! holding out offerings to her with our hands, and taking the occasion to wound her with our lips.

The treasurer's duties were very heavy, and the zest with which he fulfilled them did not fail to attract notice and admiration. Even Mr. Claverton, who maintained a lynx-eyed supervision of every item of receipt and expenditure, admitted that the work could not have been done more efficiently. Every other member of the Relief Committee, praised Twiss without stint: it was indeed impossible to listen to his pathetic accounts of the sufferers and remain unimpressed by the eagerness he displayed in helping them, although he took evident pains to keep his own doings entirely in the background,

deprecating every allusion to them. Where was there another man who would have entered into the work so whole-heartedly, sparing no trouble, spending time and strength so freely?

“The fact is, he is doing too much,” remarked Dr. Forbes to Gavin Wishart. “I don’t know whether you have observed how careworn and haggard he has looked lately? He is a very sensitive man, he takes all this distress too much to heart. Ah! my dear young sir, it is at such a time as this that the worth of a man’s religion is evidenced. I must confess I used to wonder a little at the extraordinary attachment of your late relative to his man of business; I see now that he discerned, what it has taken me long to find out, the enthusiasm Richard Twiss displays in the cause of suffering humanity. But you must have discovered this for yourself in your dealings with him.”

“I have not had very many dealings with him until lately, Dr. Forbes. Mr. Claverton manages my affairs, you know.”

“But I thought—I understood, that my old

friend left considerable sums for charitable purposes, and that you and Richard Twiss were in some way concerned in them?"

"Oh, you are thinking of those two Funds of his! Yes, he did appoint Mr. Twiss solicitor, and co-trustee with me."

Gavin hastened to change the subject, being uncomfortably aware that the enthusiastic zeal displayed by the treasurer of the Relief Fund, found no parallel in his own conduct with regard to the application of the Funds committed to *his* care.

The Relief Committee held frequent meetings at the treasurer's office, and at the next of these, Gavin, having had his attention drawn to Richard's altered appearance, was so much struck by it, that he commented on it to Mr. Claverton when they left.

"Do you think this work is too much for him?" he asked. "Ought we not to insist on some one sharing it?"

"No, no—let him alone. He would not thank you for robbing him of half his honours. This is all his own doing, remember; there is

not the smallest necessity for him to see to a third of what he has undertaken."

"*I think,*" asserted Gavin, with some warmth, "that he is devoting his time to these unfortunate people most generously! I am really ashamed that it has taken me so long to see him in his true light: he is a singularly disinterested man!"

Mr. Claverton smiled indulgently in response to this little outburst: rather astonished by it, nevertheless. He knew nothing of a powerful influence at work just now within his young companion, the ascendancy of which was becoming every day more complete.

Gavin had given free rein to his love for Mary Forester. It no longer occurred to him that it would be a condescension on his part to marry this penniless girl; rather he feared lest she should count him unworthy of her. When he was in her presence, he was more keenly alive to his own shortcomings than at any other time, and yet, keenly aware of those possibilities for good latent within him, which seemed to him to be fostered by his contact with her.

For Mary was one of those rare women to whom it is given to elevate many lives and to degrade none. The influence she exercised upon her own sex, was chiefly of a negative kind—women checked their tongues in her presence; even so hardened a slanderer as Mrs. Melvin, found herself quite unable to tell this gentle girl some tales that she had no hesitation in telling to others. Over men, Mary's influence was much more active. They worshipped her for her beauty of face and purity of heart: they showed her only what was noblest in themselves: they recognized intuitively that nothing that was not good would find any favour with her, and their exertions to win her regard certainly did them no harm. So malleable a nature as Gavin's, was rapidly dominated by her influence. He was growing quick to perceive what pleased and what displeased her.

Those startled looks of pained surprise, with which in the earlier days of their acquaintance she had greeted some sneering remark of his, haunted his memory until he began almost unconsciously to shape his words and thoughts

into conformity with what he believed to be her ideal. And this he did, not only when he was reminded of his monitor by her presence. A very tender conscience had been begotten in him, which it was becoming daily more impossible to violate. Also, he was awakening to a sense of his neglected duties. For months he had been content to enjoy his wealth in idleness, but a sympathetic commonplace regarding the weight of anxiety that must be his on account of his possessions, fell from Mary's lips one day and illuminated the subject for him. When the girl had spoken, he turned impulsively to her, and took her hand.

"Miss Mary," he said, "I think I should never do wrong again, if you were always near to advise me. You have shown me a hundred things that I was blind to before. I have certainly neglected work that old Mr. Wishart expected me to attend to, but I shall not neglect it any longer."

How Mary's heart beat, how her face glowed! Was it possible that her advice was of value, her suggestions were of use? No one

at the Manse ever thought of asking her advice: Kate always treated her suggestions with amused tolerance. How sweet it was to be appreciated, and appreciated by Gavin Wishart. She wrote his words on her heart, and brooded over her hidden treasure: she, *she*, was actually influencing the life of a man!

On the present occasion, Gavin's thoughts having wandered from admiration of Richard Twiss' devotion and energy to the contemplation of his own dilatory habits, he surprised his companion, after an interval, by a sudden question.

"What do you think of Argentines as an investment?"

"Excellent counters to gamble with," replied Mr. Claverton. "Why do you ask?"

"I have a few thousands to invest; I want your opinion."

"Well, if I had the spare money, and required a little excitement, I should buy Argentines, and keep them--for a very short time."

"They are safe enough, aren't they? I hold some already for the Prisoners' Aid scheme, and

thought of buying others for the Indigent Fund."

"Invest trust money in Argentines!" exclaimed Mr. Claverton, "I should not care to have you for my trustee. No, no. Take my advice—sell out what you hold and think yourself lucky to get out without loss. There will be a big reaction presently. As a trustee it is not your business to take risky securities for the sake of making large profits: a moderate, steady return is all you have to look for. Sell out, sell out, if you're wise."

They were close to the solicitor's office. "Will you come in?" he asked, but Gavin shook his head, and began slowly to retrace his steps.

He had implicit faith in Mr. Claverton's judgment in money matters, and his mind was now considerably disturbed. Only a day or two before, he had all but authorised Richard Twiss to invest still more of the Trust money in Argentine Bonds, owing to that gentleman's warm recommendation of them: now he wished with all his heart, either that his benevolent old

relative had not saddled him with this troublesome trusteeship, or else that he had been free from the doubtful advantage of Richard Twiss' co-operation and advice. He recalled with some misgivings that Twiss had counselled him to rely in these matters on his own judgment, and on no account to be influenced by the timidity of *some* advisers he could name, who thought the proper way to invest money was to lay it up in an old stocking.

"It would be so different," Twiss had urged, "if you yourself were entirely without experience. With your sagacity, foresight, and knowledge of the world, you need not be dependent on any one."

As he recalled this speech, Gavin's face tingled. He knew perfectly well that he had neither sagacity, nor foresight, nor wide experience: but was in plain truth vacillating and easily led, with sufficient wit to be aware of his weakness and sufficient vanity to desire to hide it.

"There is still time," he reflected courageously, "I shall put a stop to this !"

He began to arrange a conversation between Twiss and himself, in the course of which he was to evince a good deal of sagacity. He heard himself allude to a probable big reaction in Argentines, and hint at the considerations that should influence a trustee in his choice of investments. In a fervour of determination, he reached the lawyer's office and went as usual to his private room.

Richard sat with his head bent forward, resting on his hands; as Gavin approached he looked up—his face was grey, was agonized, his lips twitched with pain. The sight was so alarming as to startle Gavin's sentences from his mind.

"You are terribly ill!" he exclaimed. "Can I do anything? Shall I call some one?"

Unable to speak, Twiss motioned with his hand toward the structure of pigeon holes surmounting his writing table: into the centre of these a small mirror had been fitted, Gavin divined that it was the door to a recess, he opened it and found a spirit flask within the compartment. To pour out brandy and hold it

to the sufferer's lips was the work of a moment; Twiss drank, gasped, and began to breathe more freely; the livid hue died away from his face, he wiped the dampness from his forehead. Presently he looked up with an attempt at a smile.

"I am better. That was not so bad. You can't guess what a relief it is to have the pain go. I am sorry to have alarmed you."

"You are surely seriously ill," Gavin said, much concerned.

"I have these attacks occasionally; it is heart complaint. I have been doing too much." He turned over the papers on his desk listlessly. "Pray sit down, Mr. Wishart. You wanted something?"

"I had better come at another time."

"No: I assure you I am all right now."

"Are you really able to talk?"

"Quite able."

Gavin made an unsuccessful attempt to collect his scattered sentences.

"The fact is," he said, "I have been reconsidering matters. I think it will be as well, on

the whole, not to invest that £2000 in Argentines."

"Not! I understood we were to purchase at once. I did so. The bonds came by to-day's mail"—Twiss feebly lifted one pile of papers, and then another, as he spoke—"I thought I had them here: no, I must have locked them up." He rose, steadying himself by a chair.

"Oh, don't trouble," protested Gavin, alarmed to see how much the pain had weakened him. "I can come again."

"They are here," said Richard. He had unlocked the safe, and handed the parcel of bonds to Gavin, who turned it over mechanically, noticing that they were neatly done up in the lawyer's usual methodical manner—tied round with red tape and conspicuously labelled "Indigent Gentlewomen's Fund"—also that some careless person had splashed them with ink in a way that seemed vaguely familiar.

"Of course if you wish it we can sell out to-morrow," continued Twiss, "but it seems a pity. Hold them for a time, at any rate. They are rising steadily, and safe to go higher."

“Well—perhaps——” Gavin half assented.

The lawyer returned the bonds to his safe, and seated himself again.

“I think we are lucky to get them at the price,” he said wearily. “We have cleared three per cent. on them since yesterday.” His voice became faint. “I shall have to ask you to go, after all, Mr. Wishart. I am not fit for more work just now.”

Gavin left at once.

On his way home, it occurred to him that, in the circumstances, it might not be very long before the Wishart Charitable Funds were transferred to Mr. Claverton’s management: but he dismissed the thought hastily. He felt unaccountably remorseful because he had distrusted such a sufferer even for a few minutes. The agonized look in the poor man’s face had made a most painful impression on him. He could not rid himself of the remembrance; it haunted him the whole day through, and was with him at night when he dropped off to sleep.

In the middle of the night, he found himself sitting bolt upright in bed—strangely wide

awake, every nerve quivering, every faculty on the alert. He looked down at his hands half expecting to find them full of papers: for he had been dreaming of his interview with the lawyer and of the parcel splashed by ink which, in his dream, had poured over the paper in a rude resemblance to a map of the Dark Continent. Suddenly the explanation flashed upon him. "I have seen that parcel before," he cried aloud. "I had it in my hands in Twiss' office, three months ago. I could swear to the shape of the stain, even to the smaller blot that looked like Madagascar. Did Twiss give them to me by mistake? No, for they were labelled to-day as securities for the Indigent Fund. Three months ago when he first shewed them to me, they were Prisoners' Aid securities. Very queer, to say the least of it. What can it mean?"

He appealed to the darkness: and when his voice ceased, it seemed to him that the darkness surged with sounds which carried confusion into his brain. The extraordinarily vivid impression with which he had awakened, was clean gone

from him. He pressed his hands against his eyes in the effort to recall the exact appearance of the bonds—he could see nothing but Richard's face, distorted with pain. He tried to think consistently, to reason out the meaning of the reappearance of the parcel—but the most trivial events of the day crowded into his mind, making consistent thought impossible.

"I shall see them again. I shall call at the office to-morrow," he decided.

It was some time before his excited fancy would let him sleep; but when he wakened in broad daylight, the visions of the night time appeared utterly absurd. He was almost ashamed that he had entertained them seriously—and yet, and yet, they had seemed so real. Although he protested to himself that it was outrageous to suppose a man of such standing as Richard Twiss capable of fraud, an uncomfortable suspicion crept over him now and again. To shake it off entirely, he went to the lawyer's office, and was almost relieved when he learned that Mr. Twiss was too unwell to be at business that day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE two weeks that remained of June, after John Cayford's return, were unusually radiant that year. Clouds might be summoned by the sun at sunset to add to his glory, but they disappeared before dawn, and day followed day in unvaried splendour—glowing with light and warmth, gay with the song of birds, sweet with the scent of flowers. Two of the inmates of the Manse, found the time pass all too quickly. They took long walks to favourite and almost forgotten haunts. They paid long visits to various old folks in the village, who had known John Cayford from his boyhood, and who insisted on his partaking of tea and scones and Ayrshire cheese, while they told him of relatives of their own in Australia and produced sundry well worn letters from abroad for his inspection. Mary was his constant companion, ready at any hour for any excursion he

liked to propose. Together they sailed out to Ailsa Craig, and walked to Lendal Foot, and revisited all the places that had been dear to Alice. Kate was occasionally asked to join them, but she excused herself, she was too busy, she said. She *was* busy: not only in waging war against material foes, (for it pleased her at this particular period to have the Manse thoroughly cleaned from attic to basement—a proceeding which bewildered her uncle, wearied herself, and gave John and Mary every reason to remain out of doors,) but also in waging war against certain devils who took up their abode in her heart, and refused, for the time being, to be driven out.

Kate—whose soul had so lately been thrilled to its depths by the most overpowering and inspiring emotion she had ever experienced, so that, for a brief space, she seemed to herself to have attained to the knowledge of all good—had now attained to the knowledge of much evil; was, in fact, a prey to jealousy, anger, hatred even. Throughout the day, she performed such miracles of energy, that the

stolid Bella was amazed at her mistress' ardour : and at night, she sank wearied upon her bed, to be tormented through long hours by thoughts which she had not the strength to banish. She would rise in the morning, heavy eyed and languid, with that numbness and apathy about her heart, which is pleasure in comparison with the pain of feeling ; it did not, unfortunately, outlast the breakfast hour. The kindly sun tanned her cheeks to mask her pallor ; but nothing could disguise the unromantic fact that her temper suffered.

"I wish some one would go to Raeden, for me," said Mr. Ferris one morning. "There is a message I want taken to your old friend Morison the weaver, Kate : I should like him to have it to-day."

No one responded to this appeal : Kate, to whom it was more particularly addressed, studied the contents of her coffee cup intently. Raeden was a village five miles distant, the road to it was dusty, shadeless, and uninteresting ; Kate not infrequently went there, but to-day she felt weary and unequal to the walk.

Mary glanced hesitatingly at her cousin, and then spoke.

"I am so sorry, Uncle, that I have promised to lunch at Doune House with John. I am afraid there would not be time to do both, unless indeed, I left directly after lunch; then I might manage it."

"Why Mary," said John, "Doune House must be two miles in the opposite direction. You could not walk so far."

"Well then," continued Mary, anxious to solve the difficulty, "suppose I go to Raeden instead of Doune House. You must go there, John, but the Craigs can see me at any time: I don't believe they would mind."

"Certainly *I* should mind. Will to-morrow do, Mr. Ferris? we can go for you then. Even if Mary were to break her engagement, Raeden is too far off for her to walk there alone: don't you agree with me Kate?"

Kate had listened apathetically to the conversation; she did not care, she told herself, how they settled the matter. This direct appeal affected her strangely. Why should John apply

to her, to sanction his own plans—to acquiesce with the absurd consideration with which Mary was treated? She flashed a quick glance at him from her dark eyes, and conveyed in her tone all the sarcasm at her command, as she answered, “Decidedly I agree with you. Considering Mary’s age, it is quite out of the question for her to walk five miles along a country road in broad daylight, without a companion. I have the good fortune to be three years older. Give me your message, Uncle, I can take it this afternoon.”

She had the satisfaction to see amazed looks exchanged by her companions, and she struggled desperately with an inclination to cry.

“Oh Kate, dear,” exclaimed Mary, herself almost in tears, “do let me go for you; or else, say that I may go with you.”

“Thanks” rejoined Kate, icily, “there is no need to alter any arrangements. I shall enjoy the walk. I prefer to be alone.”

After this, the subject was dropped. Kate went to Raeden in due course, wrestled with

her enemies all the way, and got the better of them before her return.

John dismissed this little episode from his mind, with the reflection that Kate must be a most unsympathetic companion for Mary: but later in the day, it recurred to him. He and Mary, had accustomed themselves to end every day with a stroll along the solitary sea shore. They had a favourite resting place among the rocks, and came to it evening after evening, to watch the sun sink down behind the sea while the grey twilight crept across the sky. This evening, while they sat there, Mary stretched out her hands to the sea with a deep sigh of content.

“How beautiful life is!” she exclaimed. “How good God is, to make such a wonderful world and let us live in it. Did you ever see such colours as there are to-night, John? Did you ever hear such music as the sea makes? Don’t the waves seem to speak to you? they do, to me.”

“Do they, Mary, what do they say?”

“Oh I can’t tell. I never can find words to

say what I want: and the waves don't use words, they only convey ideas to me somehow. To-night they seem very happy, I can almost hear them laugh. Some nights they are so dreadfully sad, it makes me cry to listen to them."

Her allusion to crying, reminded her companion that the unwarrantable harshness in Kate's voice that morning, had brought tears into Mary's eyes. He felt suddenly very wrathful with Kate for her carelessness in wounding this sensitive soul. It was strange that Kate should have altered so; she used not to shew so much temper in former days. At one time he had been quite attached to her, and had thought her superior to any girl he knew—except Mary. He wondered whether Mary suffered often from her cousin's sharp tongue.

"What upset Kate, this morning?" he asked, as the outcome of these reflections.

"Oh, John, we were to blame," cried Mary, loyal to Kate. "I don't know exactly what we could have done, but we ought to have done something. I have felt vexed about it all day.

Kate was too tired for such a long walk : to-night, she looks as though she could scarcely stand. She has been doing ever so much, this week, and I have not helped her at all. There isn't much that I can do, but I might have offered to wash the china in the drawingroom, the other day, instead of going with you to Ailsa Craig. I only thought of it after we had started."

" Really, Mary, I don't see why you should feel bound to assist, whenever Kate chooses to make work."

" Well," admitted Mary, with a gay laugh, " I do *not* know why the house is being turned up side down just now. It does not seem long since it was done last time. Still, I never do anything but enjoy myself. Do you know, John, it sometimes frightens me to think how happy my life has been. Kate has a great many worries : almost every one I know has had trouble of some kind : I have had none. Do you think it is all coming ?"

The eyes she raised to his had a look of terror in them.

"No, dear," he said gently. "Why should it come? If I can keep it away from you, it shall never touch you, Mary."

"You! Ah, but you will be going away again. When you are gone, I mean to write to you. I shall send you a letter once a month: you won't mind if they are rather stupid? Kate writes clever letters, but I don't."

"Mary, I want to speak to you about the future."

"Not to-night, John," she interrupted hastily. "I hate to think of what is coming. This has been such a nice evening, don't let us be gloomy and spoil it all. The 'future' means, you out in Australia, and I—I don't know where! No, no: we will not speak of it."

"But, dear, you are going away to-morrow."

"Only for four days."

"I wish you were not going, Mary."

"Oh, I must. I promised Uncle Forester, ever so long ago, that I would spend his birthday with him. I shall be back on Tuesday."

"Well then, Mary, make a bargain with me. On Tuesday night, we are to come out here, and

discuss our future. Promise that, and I will not speak about it now."

"Very well, if you wish it," she assented; "though why you choose to think about such disagreeable subjects, I don't know. Do listen, John, those waves *are* laughing."

They walked home together in silence; he, intent on the thought of Tuesday. It was not so very far off—only four days. How inexpressibly dear to him Mary had become! The time they had spent together, had been more full of happiness than he had imagined possible: and this was merely a foretaste of what the future held. Always Mary should be thus perfectly happy, sheltered by his care from the remotest approach of trouble or distress: always he should find perfect happiness, in thus caring for and worshipping her. He recalled Mr. Ferris' commendations of Kate, and smiled—Kate was so unworthy to be mentioned in the same breath with her beautiful, simple-minded, pure-hearted cousin.

Mary, walking by his side, let her thoughts wander idly where they would, now to the sky,

now to the sea, now to the wild flowers on the dyke; her mind pervaded by a vague sense that it was a delightful thing to be alive, and that the world was a beautiful place to live in.

CHAPTER IX.

ON Saturday morning, Mary Forester left Feldrossan to join her cousins. Kate watched the departure, and suddenly realised that for three days she would have the undivided companionship of the man she loved. A wild recklessness took possession of her. John had gone with Mary to Garleigh, and when he returned—groaning at the thought of the irksome time that must be passed through somehow—he found a lively, brilliant companion awaiting him. No one could be more entertaining than Kate when she chose to exert herself; she exerted herself now. She made John laugh all through dinner, at her droll tales of the villagers; she revived a hundred reminiscences of his doings before he left Scotland; and she wiped out the last trace of the disagreeable impression she had made on him lately, by saying in a tone half-jesting, half-appealing, “I have to

go on a foraging expedition this afternoon, John; I must buy chickens at a farm two miles away. In spite of my advanced years and infirm temper—I would like a companion! Will you come if you have nothing better to do?" He assented most willingly.

Saturday was invariably passed by Mr. Ferris in his study, in preparation for the next day's service; no one saw him from morning to night, except Kate, who carried his meals to him on a tray which she placed beside him without a disturbing word. To-day, when she brought his dinner, she found him standing before the window absorbed in thought. He roused himself at her entrance, came toward her, held her face between his hands and kissed her forehead solemnly.

"God bless you, my dear," he said: "you are a good girl, Kate, a good girl!"

"Oh, I am not, I am not, Uncle!" protested Kate, choking down a sob. She flew to her room to make ready for her walk, fetched her marketing basket, and joined her companion.

They walked considerably further than the

farm, jesting and laughing the whole way. It was past the usual tea hour, when they returned. Kate made John carry Mr. Ferris' tea to him, she would not go into the study herself: afterwards, they strolled down the garden and seated themselves in a shaded nook. It was a breathless evening, the air was laden with the scent of roses and mignonette, not a leaf stirred on the trees, the sea murmured indistinctly. That night and the two that followed, burned themselves into Kate's memory. She made John talk. By adroit questions and suggestions, she drew from him an account of his life in Melbourne and the whole history of his business difficulties and struggles. She could talk well herself; but she possessed also the rarer gift of making others talk well, and of making them feel that they did so. During a momentary pause in their conversation, they heard the Church clock strike ten. John looked up in amazement.

"How the time has flown! You are good company, Kate."

"Thank you," she said, with a sudden rush

of colour to her face. "We must go in now, however, Uncle likes early hours kept on Saturday."

"The walk to-day has done you good, Kate; you begin to look like yourself. What on earth makes you slave as you have been doing? You ought to take more rest; come for a long sail with me on Monday."

"I will," said Kate.

When she had closed her bedroom door, her vivacity left her.

"Now I shall have to pay for all this, I suppose," she muttered between her teeth. But she was mistaken. None of the tormenting thoughts she dreaded came to keep her wakeful for hours. The devils who still held their ground arrayed themselves as angels of light; they laid soothing hands about her heart, and whispered peace in her ear. "Why torment yourself," they whispered, "why think at all? You have kept yourself out of this man's way for two weeks: now that his companionship is thrust upon you, you must entertain him, you cannot help yourself. It is not your

doing that this duty falls to you, it cannot be a sin to be courteous"—the poison worked, Kate was almost asleep—"Moreover," whispered the devils, "he and Mary are not engaged. You have absolutely no positive proof that they care for each other. It is only natural that he should feel bound to shew every attention to her for Alice's sake, if for no other reason. What are looks worth? You may be mistaken. And you have only three days"—Kate slept.

On Sunday she sat with John in the old Parish Church. The Manse pew was at the far end of the building, with a high partition in front of it which almost hid the occupants when they were seated.

Mr. Ferris preached a remarkable sermon that day. His instinct had misled him on some points, but not on others: he had once thought that John loved Kate, now he *knew* that Kate loved John. He understood her impulsive abandonment of herself to hard work. For her sake he accepted, with mute resignation, all the discomforts attendant on an unnecessary house cleaning. He had watched her most

anxiously throughout the past fortnight ; fathoming the meaning of her weary looks and her little outbursts of temper, and longing to convey some comfort to her. He debated whether he should speak to her directly, but he dared not ; Kate's proud spirit would not tolerate a word from him. Finally, after much prayer, he decided to preach to her from his pulpit. His sermon from beginning to end, was intended for Kate alone—and she knew it. The moment he announced his text, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," Kate divined what had been in his mind when he had kissed her so solemnly : and though she could not prevent the words he spoke from piercing her ears, she steeled her heart firmly against them. The stolid congregation was amazed at the unwonted eloquence with which Mr. Ferris unburdened himself of his fervid utterances ; those who were usually inclined to sleep through the discourse, found themselves unaccountably wide awake ; even the consumption of peppermints ceased, except among the very juvenile members of the flock.

He shewed his audience that the words had a spiritual significance, above the material meaning they were accustomed to attach to them: that the spiritual life to which they referred, was the life of Love: that the life of Love involved self-sacrifice. He shewed how mothers and fathers sacrifice themselves for their children, how husbands and wives sacrifice themselves for each other, and how these sacrifices are appreciated and reciprocated in after years: and then he spoke of the sacrifices made by men for men, and, more often still, by women for women—sacrifices unappreciated, unseen perhaps by any human eye, but felt, known, treasured, by the Heart of Love, by God. He admitted the darkness of the path they were called upon to tread who made such sacrifices: he did not deny the agony involved, the awful suffering to be endured: but he pointed those, who were tempted to shrink from the suffering and give up the battle, to One who, having suffered temptation Himself, knew how to rescue all tempted ones now. And then, his voice trembling with emotion, the old man ended his

discourse, fell upon his knees, and said, "Brethren, we will plead with God on behalf of all who are tempted, that their faith fail not. Let us pray!"

The devils in Kate's heart rose up undisguised, and prompted her to pray for fine weather on the morrow.

"Eh man! yon's a gran' orator!" said the fishermen to one another as they left the church.

Throughout that afternoon, Mr. Ferris contrasted the subdued gaiety, the gentleness, the tenderness even, in Kate's manner now, with the brusquerie she had shown before: he said to himself gratefully, "Praise be to God, my sermon has helped the poor child already."

John and Kate, started early for their sail next day: there was a fine breeze blowing, but the weather looked unsettled. Their boat flew before the wind, cutting through the water with a swiftness that gave Kate an odd sense of elation; rapid movement of any kind had a fascination for her. She seemed as though she had never known care, her eyes were brilliant, her face glowed with colour, her laugh of pure

enjoyment was pleasant to hear: John was astonished at her gaiety. Time flew as swiftly as the boat. Towards five o'clock, the sky became over-cast and the wind dropped: they were by this time not far from home, they lowered the sail and John took the oars.

"Confess now, Kate," he said, after looking at her for a little, "all this rest and fresh air has brightened you wonderfully."

"Yes," she said, "it makes me sleep better, I am less wakeful at nights."

"Were you very wakeful?"

"Very."

"What kept you awake, I wonder?"

"The devil."

"Kate!"

"Don't look so shocked," she said with a reckless laugh; "that was a statement, not an exclamation. Besides, I am not Mary, you know."

"No."

She thought she detected an accent of relief in his voice, and her anger rose.

"People like Mary, draw goodness into their

souls as readily as they draw air into their lungs: others—don't. It must be easy enough to be good when one gets everything one wants."

"Does Mary?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"Never."

"I am sorry, Kate," he said, touched by the bitterness that looked out from her eyes. "What is it that you want now? Can't I help you to get it? I would like to."

"Yes, you can:" she said deliberately. "Give me the oars first, and look about for the fishing tackle, I put it somewhere. There is bait in that jar over there—or was, before we had luncheon! It will rain in five minutes. What I want just now, is to have my larder stocked with fish."

Following her directions, he had excellent sport for the next half hour.

Kate watched him furtively. "It is easy to divert a man's thoughts," she reflected: "what strange things satisfy men! Uncle used to

whip the Stinchar hour after hour, quite happy, apparently. Suppose a man were out fishing, and heard a rumour that his wife were dead, and felt a bite at the same moment—would he stop to land his fish before going home, I wonder? I think he would: especially if there were nothing but the fish to remind him of public opinion.”

“What is the problem now, Kate?” said John, turning to look at her.

“I was wishing,” she sighed, “that *I* could find it soothing to kill fishes.”

“You should find it soothing to have so many killed for you: we shall never eat all these. Is there a basket here?”

“No. One of the men will take them to the house for us.”

“Change places then, Kate. Goodness! you are quite wet: I never noticed how heavily it is raining.”

CHAPTER X.

KATE appeared next morning with a large apron tied over her dress, suggestive of work in prospect: John noticed it at once, his thoughts had not been so entirely diverted from its wearer as she supposed.

"Now Kate," he exclaimed, "you need not think that you will be allowed to knock yourself up again, just immediately. You are to walk with me to Garleigh; we shall lunch at the old inn, and meet Mary at the station."

"I have work to do," said Kate hesitatingly.

"It must wait, then: we start at twelve."

Mr. Ferris looked rather bewildered when this arrangement was explained to him. He had an indefinite idea that things were not going rightly. When had Kate absented herself from her work on two consecutive days before?

"If it is only a question of meeting Mary," he said, "I can save you the trouble. I have a

christening at Main's of Overton, this afternoon, and I can leave word, as I drive past the station, that Mary is to wait there till I come for her."

"But it is more than a question of meeting Mary, Mr. Ferris. Kate will stop indoors the whole day, if some one does not make her go out."

"Very well, very well: let her please herself."

Kate seemed undecided, but at twelve o'clock she appeared, equipped for a walk.

Life at Garleigh was rather exciting than otherwise. There was an element of uncertainty about it, due to the fact that the railway line was doubled just outside the station, to permit the train from the North, to pass the train from the South. Whichever came in first, had to retire to the siding to wait for the other—it was never quite certain which would come in first. Three times a day, for fifteen or twenty minutes before the trains were expected, the station master, and the porter met to discuss probabilities, stimulated occasionally by ques-

tions from a passenger or a passing labourer: the detaining effects of various fairs, markets, and holidays were canvassed, while Barron dilated upon the semi-barbaric days before the line was doubled. Barron was fully conscious of the importance of his position. The privilege and responsibility of receiving two trains in the station at the same time, does not fall to the lot of every station master—he cherished a pharisaic gratitude that he was not as were the station masters of Glenessle and Kirkton. He had his griefs. It was a positive pain to him to see the mail train dash disdainfully past Garleigh; in moments of great exaltation he imagined himself detaining the mail train for two or three minutes on the siding.

Other subjects than the vagaries of railway trains, were discussed on the station platform. Barron, as an elder of the church, was an authority on doctrinal points; and, as the first to receive the weekly paper which was shared by a select few in the village, he was frequently applied to for information regarding the doings of the outer world. The information given,

he interspersed so freely with comments of his own, that to the Garleigh mind it remained uncertain whether Mr. Gladstone or Barron was responsible for the dictum that Home Rule was the only right treatment for the Crofter disturbances and the Irish difficulties—evils which were directly attributable to Original Sin aggravated by Tory obstinacy.

“Which train do you expect first to-day, Mr. Barron?” inquired Kate, as she and her companion came upon the platform.

The station master held up his hand to command silence, assumed an intent expression, and remained rigid for a few moments during which the porter struggled with a desire to clear his throat. At last Barron’s features relaxed—“She’s whuslin’ Glenessle!” he announced.

“Oh, the South train! We shall have to wait some minutes, John.”

They wandered up and down the platform, pending the arrival of the South train, which came in presently and was relegated to the siding after the guard, the engine driver, and Barron had indulged in a leisurely conversa-

tion. Then the North train came flying round a distant curve at full speed, as though it had not the remotest intention of stopping anywhere: suddenly the driver seemed to realise what was expected of him, steam was turned off, the brakes applied, and the train brought violently to a stand-still in front of the platform.

Mary alighted. She seemed to be even more radiantly happy than usual: she kissed Kate several times, and clung closely to her arm as if the embrace were meant to convey some idea that she could not express in words.

"I can't help it, Kate," she said, in answer to her cousin's look of astonishment. "The day is so lovely, and the sun is so bright, and I am so happy! Have you two missed me?"

"Have you missed us?" returned Kate nervously. "My dear Mary, do you intend to keep up this pace all the way home? Remember we have two miles to walk yet."

The distance seemed short. Mary's gay humour infected her companions: she questioned them about their doings, enlightened

them as to her own, and found material for laughter in everything that was said. When they were within half a mile of the Manse, they were overtaken by Mr. Ferris, who stopped driving as he reached them.

"Let me go the rest of the way with you, Uncle," cried Mary.

"Come then, you witch, here are the reins. Is it only four days since you left us?"

She took her seat, and leaned forward to kiss him.

"Yes," she said slowly, "only four days: but it seems more like a year."

"So I think, child; I have missed you."

She waved her hand to the others, and drove away.

"Mary is like sunshine!" exclaimed Kate involuntarily. John turned to her at once.

"Ah, you feel that too, Kate. I cannot imagine how you and Mr. Ferris get on when she is away for any length of time."

"We survive."

"Yes, of course: but what a difference it must make."

“People cannot always have sunshine,” said Kate shortly.

“Kate, I know what you must be thinking of. I must seem very selfish to you: but remember that I have had to do without her for seven years, and you have had her all that time. It is my turn now.”

Kate became suddenly breathless; an aching chill stole over her, she seemed to herself to be drifting off into distance, and yet she was distinctly conscious of the roughness of the ground beneath her feet. She heard a voice, that seemed to come from a long way off, say, “You know what I want, Kate; wish me well,” and she heard another voice, surely not her own, respond, “I have always wished your happiness with all my heart.”

The rest of the walk was a blank.

After tea, it was not suggested that open air exercise would be advisable for Kate. John and Mary found their way outside as usual, and turned toward the rocks.

“Not a word, John, until we are there, and

then I am going to speak first," cried Mary. "Do let us walk as fast as ever we can."

"Certainly," he said, bewildered by her haste.

They reached the rocks, and the exceeding beauty of the scene spread before them, held them silent for a little.

"It is just as I hoped it would be," sighed Mary, with tightly clasped hands, "such wonderful colours, and the sea looking so happy, and Arran quite clear. Why do you look at Arran like that, John? Does it remind you of something?"

"It makes me think of Grand Canary on an infinitely small scale," he answered slowly, "and that reminds me of——"

"Of what?"

"Oh, no matter: something I had almost forgotten. We did not come here to speak of that."

"Of Grand Canary? no, indeed! John, I have been so impatient for the evening to come."

"So have I, Mary." He held out his hands

to her, and she put her own within them, speaking eagerly—

“I made up my mind that you should be the first to know. I would not tell any one, not even Kate, before you. You are so dear, and good, and kind to me: you will be so glad when you hear what I have to tell. It only happened yesterday. I am going to be married, John.”

His fingers closed over hers with a tight grip, so that she winced with pain.

“I don’t understand you. Say that again.”

“Ah, I don’t wonder you cannot understand, I can hardly believe it myself. To think of any one caring like that, for me! But it is quite true: he does care for me, though I am not worth it, and oh!—I—am—so—happy.”

“How long has this been going on?” The sound of his voice quite startled her.

“Do you mean, how long have I known him? A year, I think: but I have not seen him often until lately. I never knew he cared for me till yesterday.”

“Do you love him, Mary?”

“More than I can tell you, John.” She breathed out the words as if they were almost too sacred for any one to hear.

He let go her hands and turned away from her abruptly. Mary looked after him in amazement: he had not even said that he was pleased. She felt suddenly very sore at heart. Tears gathered in her eyes and stole down her face; she could not see the colours in the sky any longer, the waves mocked her with their laughter—it was all so different from what she had expected. She crouched down on the rocks, and looked at the hands that still ached with the rough treatment they had received: the sight of the dark finger marks on them seemed, somehow, to accentuate her disappointment. In spite of herself, she sobbed aloud. John came back to her instantly.

“Don’t cry, Mary. Dear, I can’t bear to see you cry. What is the matter?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I thought you would be pleased, but I never heard you speak so harshly before, and you have hurt my hands.”

He took them in his own, and covered them with kisses.

"There! does that prove to you that I did not mean to hurt them? Harsh words! have I used harsh words? and to you! What would you like me to say, dear? Tell me, and I will say it."

"I thought you would have said, how glad you are that I am happy."

"I—am glad that you are happy."

She smiled faintly, already the world seemed brighter.

"Thank you, John, I knew you would be pleased. I am so glad I have told some one; it has been dreadfully hard to say nothing about it all the afternoon. I do wish, John, that you could be as happy as I. Do you know, when I saw you together this afternoon, I thought that perhaps you and—and Kate——"

"Hush, Mary!" Again his voice startled her. "I want you to go back to the Manse, dear: without waiting for me, you understand? And tell them—what you have told me. Will you? before I come back?"

“Of course I will.”

She rose at once, struck her foot against a stone, and almost fell. Instantly he had lifted her, and carried her to the road. There he stood, holding her hands in his, and speaking rapidly.

“I am to blame. I had no right to use harsh words, and blind your eyes with tears so that you could not see the way. And the rocks are too rough for your feet: you should have none but smooth places to walk on, if I——! Mary, don’t you understand? I want your happiness only, always; it is dearer to me than anything; I would give my life to secure it. Mary, *can’t* you understand?”

“Oh, yes, indeed, John: you have made me very happy again. I knew you would be glad about it: it is very good of you to care so much.”

“Go, Mary, quickly.”

She went, and he followed her with his eyes. Of course she had not understood: he hated himself, because he wished that she had.

CHAPTER XI.

LONG before Mary's return to the Manse, Kate had gone to her room. A headache, which existed to a small extent and was presently to be intensified, was her excuse for retiring early. Truth to tell, she shrank from Mary's confidences: to weep with the mournful seemed far easier in the present circumstances than to rejoice with the joyful. She paced up and down her room, starting at every sound, miserable with apprehension when she heard footsteps in her neighbourhood. An hour passed; and she was beginning to reckon upon being undisturbed that night, when her door was gently pushed open, and a low voice called, "Kate!"

"Come in, Mary."

"I was afraid you might be asleep, dear. I am so sorry about your poor head, is it very bad?"

"It has been worse."

"Will it hurt you if I come in and talk a little?"

"No."

Mary stole across the room to the window where her cousin stood, and leaned her head against Kate's shoulder.

"I wish you would kiss me," she said.

Kate stooped down to give the required caress.

"What does that prelude, Mary?"

"Oh, you don't often kiss me, you know, and to-night I want to *feel* that you love me. Such a wonderful thing has happened!"

"I suppose I know what it is."

"You can't I am sure: you would never guess it. It is the most unlikely thing you can think of, to have happened to me! If he had fallen in love with you, now, I should not have been at all surprised: you are so clever and sensible."

"So I am to understand that some one has fallen in love with you."

"Yes, dear," Mary raised her head and

whispered in Kate's ear—"I am engaged to be married!"

Kate kissed her again.

"I hope you will be very happy, Mary. You will have a good husband."

"Indeed I shall, far better than I deserve! And if you knew him as well as I do, you would be as astonished as I am, that he cares for me: but you will see him to-morrow. I have told him a great deal about you, and he wants to know you better. He could not quite remember what you are like, but then he has only seen you twice."

"Only seen me twice!"

"I meant you to be the second to hear about it," pursued Mary eagerly: "don't be vexed with me because I told Uncle before you. You see, I found him in the parlour after I came back from telling John, so I just told him."

"'Telling John!'" Kate repeated the words in utter bewilderment. "What did you tell John?"

"Why Kate, dear! that I am going to be married of course."

"*You* told him! Mary, my headache has made me dense, I cannot understand you, tell me again."

"Really you are all very stupid to-night," cried Mary half petulantly. "I have to keep on explaining, and explaining! Do try to understand Kate: I am going to be married to Gavin Wishart."

Kate leaned against the window for support; her mind was in hopeless confusion, she wished she could steady it as easily as she steadied herself.

"What did he say?" she asked at length.

"Gavin? About you, do you mean?"

"No, no, Mary: John."

"He did not say much, at first. He was surprised, of course: then he said how glad he was that I am so happy. He spoke very, very kindly—oh *very* kindly indeed: as he always does, you know."

Kate realised then, with painful vividness, what that interview on the rocks must have meant to the man concerned. A great flood of pity rose up in her heart, sweeping away before

it the passionate jealousy, envy, and hatred cherished there. The selfishness that had bound her affection until now, fell off from her : at last that greatest love was revealed which can lay down its life unhesitatingly. She could have knelt there before Mary, and implored her to go and fill the place in this man's heart that she coveted for herself. Yet she must say nothing, her lips were sealed : the heart to will was present with her, but not the power to do. Measuring his suffering by her own misery, she put up her hands to her head and burst into tears. Mary was terrified. With her, tears were a daily occurrence : but to see Kate cry, suggested something dreadful, such as a death.

Kate recovered herself instantly.

"I beg your pardon, Mary, dear ; something must have unnerved me. Please don't look so unhappy."

"Oh, Kate, I have been hatefully selfish : I ought not to have disturbed you when I knew that your head ached. I had better go."

"Stay, Mary, I want to hear more. Who is

this Mr. Wishart? I don't know that I remember him."

It was a subject on which Mary could have spoken for hours.

"You must remember him, Kate. You saw him three months ago, when we lunched at Uncle Forester's. Afterwards I asked you if you did not think he had kind eyes, and you said you did."

"Did I? I can't recall his face. Did you care for him then, dear?"

"When I think of it," said Mary meditatively, "I am quite sure that I must have. Indeed I can't tell now, when I did not care for him."

"You never said anything to me about it."

"Why, Kate! how could I? I did not know until yesterday, that he loved me. But you don't know how wicked I have been. Ever so many nights lately, I have not said my prayers properly—because I was thinking of him all the time; and I have often read a chapter in my Bible three times over, and not known *then* what it was about!"

The gathering darkness hid the smile that stole involuntarily to Kate's lips.

"It is a very wonderful thing," continued Mary, "that I should be allowed to have such happiness : it just shews how forgiving God is ! Gavin is so generous and good, Kate. He has been busy lately, helping the Cooper's Mill Relief Fund. He is always doing kind things. The Forester girls told me, that their father heard from Mr. Anderson, how Gavin paid a large sum of money to save from disgrace a man who had got into debt and used some money that didn't belong to him. Gavin wanted him to have another chance. Don't you call that noble ! I am not worthy of such a man."

During the somewhat incoherent account of Gavin's excellencies, Kate's mind had wandered from the favoured suitor to his rival. Only her cousin's last words reached her.

"Unworthy of him ? nonsense Mary !" she said sharply. "You are worthy of some one much better. I am constantly telling you that I will not have you talk about yourself in that fashion. Why do you perpetually under-rate

your own value? I suppose you went down on your knees to this young man, and thanked him for his astonishing condescension in asking you to marry him !”

“ Kate !”

“ Tell me then, whether you did or did not intimate to him that you were not nearly good enough for him, and that you could not understand how he came to take any notice of you ?”

“ I—I——”

“ Of course you did,” railed Kate, “ I know it as certainly as if I had heard you. And you will do it again, too. Every time he kisses your beautiful face, you will thank him for his kindness : and when he shews you any ordinary attention, you will be filled with wonder at his remarkable thoughtfulness !” She stopped abruptly, drew Mary toward her, and pressed kiss after kiss on her flushed cheeks. “ There, my dear, don’t be vexed with me. You are a dear, sweet, humble-minded girl, and if I were more like you I should be a better woman than I am. Go to bed now, and dream of him, and be happy. No, wait while I ask

you one thing more. Are you sure, are you *quite* sure, Mary, that you truly love him? That—that it would be utterly impossible for you to care for any one else?"

"Oh, Kate," cried Mary in genuine distress, "I don't know what I have done that you should all doubt so whether I love Gavin. Indeed I know I am very childish about a great many things, and I daresay you none of you think I know my own mind: but I do, I do. I have no words that are strong enough to make you understand how dear he is to me. As to my caring for any one else, it is an insult to talk of such a thing!"

"You are right, dear" said Kate very gently. "Believe me, I only said it because I want to be very sure about your happiness. I was wrong to speak to you in that way: you see I keep forgetting how old you are, and think of you as a little child that I have to look after. Please forgive me, Mary, and forget what I have said."

To be asked by Kate for forgiveness, was much worse than to be scolded by her. Mary

tried to convey unspeakable things in a caress, and went to her own room in a very subdued state of mind.

"Dear, dear!" she sighed, "I wish I could think of something that Kate would like to have me do for her."

She lit her candle, opened her writing case, and drew therefrom a large envelope. The sight of the address written upon it, appeared to afford her infinite satisfaction: she studied it closely for three minutes. Then she took from it the letter and the photograph it contained. A thought occurred to her. Smiling with delight, she slipped the letter into her pocket, and went over to Kate's door.

"Would you like to see what he looks like, Kate?" she called softly.

"Very much, Mary, come and shew me."

Mary hurried to her cousin with her treasures, and found Kate still by the open window.

"Here is his photograph, Kate; and this is his writing. Let me hold the candle higher, so that you can see properly."

“He has a nice face, Mary ; he is quite good-looking.”

“*Very* good-looking,” amended Mary. “I don’t want the envelope,” she added generously.

“Thank you, dear,” said Kate, with perfect gravity.

Mary retired to her room again.

“Women—are—*fools!*” commented Kate, as the door closed.

Her hand rested on the window sill, and a sudden breeze caught the paper from her fingers, whirling it away into the darkness. She reflected that she would probably have other opportunities to admire Gavin’s handwriting.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN CAYFORD watched Mary's retreating figure until it disappeared from view, then he returned to the rocks where he and she had stood together. Arran was now half shrouded in mist, and more vividly than before it recalled to him his Tenerife experiences. In imagination he saw again the light from the Mole flicker over the water as Marco rowed the boat to shore, he felt anew the pressure of Alan's fingers, he heard distinctly those faintly-spoken last words—"tell Mary." Mary! that was the name that was so dear to himself!

He shivered: the evening air was growing chill. It had been chilly when he stood on the Mole, looking at Grand Canary, with Alan's silent form beside him. How long ago was that? Years ago, surely. What had filled his life since then—since then, and for years before? Mary!

"Now it is at an end: it is all over and done

with," he said; uttering the words aloud, as though the sound of them must force upon him the conviction that silent thought failed to give. But the hopes of years are not to be effaced by a sentence, though it be repeated a hundred times, and in tones of thunder. This night, he had taken her hands and covered them with kisses; this night, he had lifted her in his arms and held her close to his heart; this night, his dream was over? he was forever parted from her? Impossible!

A wave broke at his feet, dashing the salt spray up into his face: he became aware that the tide had risen. Had hours passed, or minutes? Darkness made the figures on his watch indistinguishable: damp mist had closed around him, drenching his coat. Through the mist he groped his way over the rocks and down the road to the Manse; conscious only of the monotonous moan of the waves, and of wondering vaguely whether that was the sound the sea had in it when it made Mary cry. Within the Manse gate a piece of white paper stared at him from the dark grounds: he picked it up

mechanically and thrust it into his pocket—Mr. Ferris disliked to see litter of any kind on his premises. The house door stood ajar, he pushed it open. When he had shut out the moaning of the sea, death-like stillness seemed to surround him. Rays of light issued from under the study door, but he went past them to the kitchen at the far end of the passage, where a brilliant fire blazed, before which regiments of socks and stockings were hanging. He pulled off his coat and seated himself in the genial glow, appreciating the sense of warmth and comfort that stole over him. It was his turn now to experience that numbness of heart which Kate found preferable to the pain of feeling.

For Mr. Ferris, the evening had been one of unusual agitation, a series of trifling circumstances having combined to upset his equanimity altogether. He was now nearly seventy years of age: it was no longer possible for him to accomplish without great fatigue the work that had formerly seemed so easy, and on the

early days of each week he invariably suffered a sense of lassitude and depression, commensurate with the amount of nervous force expended in his preparation for and execution of the Sabbath services. Kate, quick to note this sign of decreasing vitality, had hitherto been as quick to minister to it. She saw that her uncle fretted over his loss of power, and she made it her business to divert his thoughts whenever he was liable to feel his weakness most keenly. Monday and Tuesday, therefore, found her prolific in devices for his distraction: she arranged to be much with him: she consulted him on a variety of small difficulties, guiding him so deftly to the right solutions of them that he was often amazed at his own perspicacity: when she was obliged to leave him, an open novel would be found near his chair, and Mr. Ferris, who was wont to inveigh against novel-readers, would take up the book—just to see what Kate wasted her time over—and become engrossed in it immediately. By Wednesday, rest and recreation having done their work, his energy was usually restored.

But this week Kate had shamefully neglected her duties. She had absented herself from the Manse throughout Monday, she had not volunteered to accompany her uncle to Main's of Overton, she had scarcely spoken to him during Tuesday afternoon, and had left him early in the evening in solitude. Her neglect was most reprehensible, because it was his intense desire to be of service to her, that had roused Mr. Ferris to make those extra exertions on the preceeding Sabbath for which he was now paying an extra penalty of weariness.

He sat listlessly in his study, looking first at the Chinese Mission books still unread, and then at an unopened letter that lay before him. Kate should have been at hand to make excerpts from these books, Kate should have been at hand to discuss the contents of this letter—and Kate was absent. He felt very feeble, very unfit for any exertion, very old, very near death. Not long since, Mary had flown into the room in bewildering haste; had clasped her arms about his neck, and kissed him many times, giving him to understand, in incoherent

phrases, that she was very, very happy ! This was as it should be. He tried to rouse himself from his lethargy, to banish all thoughts of old age and death, and to evince a sympathetic interest in youth and love. But she mentioned a strange name, and he became once more bewildered. With great patience Mary repeated her facts, producing finally a letter given to her by her uncle Forester for Mr. Ferris, which would make the whole matter clear: then she betook herself to Kate, that the great news might be spread further.

For a long time, Mr. Ferris gazed helplessly at the letter and wished that Kate would come; at length, as she did not come, he opened it. The tightly closed envelope resisted his nerveless fingers, he tore it angrily apart, flinging it on to the ground, and then was vexed that he had been so unreasonably petulant. Mr. Forester's cramped handwriting was not easily read, eyeglasses had to be found, and the words and the sense laboriously interpreted.

" Mary " wrote Mr. Forester, " will tell you her good news: I feel it due to you, to supplement

the information she can give. Mr. Gavin Wishart, to whom she has engaged herself, is a most estimable young man. I have been acquainted with him for more than a year—ever since I settled in Glasgow, in fact. A neighbour of mine in Chicago, who is also a relative of his, gave me a letter of introduction to him. When I mention that a distant cousin of his recently left him a fortune of £200,000, you will understand that he is an excellent match for Mary from a worldly point of view. He is a member of the church to which I belong, and is well known in Glasgow to be a most benevolent and honourable young man. I told him that you are Mary's guardian: he begged me to refer you to Mr. Claverton, of Messrs. Claverton & Anderson, who will answer any enquiries you please to make regarding Mr. Wishart. He desires to marry Mary soon, and hinted at most liberal settlements: but these are points which you and he will no doubt discuss when you meet."

As the meaning of this dawned upon him, Mr. Ferris' colour rose, he dropped his eye-

glasses and the letter, and began to pace up and down the room forgetful of fatigue. This was indeed extraordinary news! He became as anxious to speak of it to some one, as Mary herself. Where *was* Kate? or, failing her, where was John? He started: the thought suddenly flashed upon him that he could not very well talk over this matter with John. He sat down helplessly in his chair again, bewildered, dazed as before: thoughts of Mary's good fortune, and of her hopeless suitor's ill fortune, distracted him alternately. He went after a while to the Manse door to look out; there was no one within sight and thick mist was falling.

"When he does come in," sighed the old man, "he will be wet through."

A glance at the parlour and study revealed that there was no fire in either. The embers in the kitchen grate still glowed faintly, Mr. Ferris piled on logs there until the fire blazed: the flames licked up the dry wood greedily, burst out into showers of sparks, roared with glee. He glanced from the glare to the clock,

and shook his head. "Too good a fire" he reflected, "the lad may think it has been done for him." He surveyed the room, and discovered two baskets containing socks and stockings. Those in one, had been washed that day: those in the other were destined for Russian Jews, on behalf of whose feet Kate and Mary had knitted all Winter and Spring, handing their accumulated work over to Bella in the Summer that she might 'run' the toes and heels. The minister knew no difference between the undried Gentile garments and the unworn Jewish socks. With a grim smile at his own diplomacy, he carefully hung them all upon a clothes-horse which he stationed in front of the fire: then he went stealthily back to his study as though he had been committing a crime.

The fate of a million Chinese now weighed less heavily on his soul than the fate of this one young man. He must say something to him when he came, what could he say? He leaned his head on his hands, letting his thoughts drift out into the Past, until the Past was

drawn closer to him than the Present. Hopeful love had wrought the resurrection once before, hopeless love wrought it now. The urgent prompting to "heal one another with our own blood," that comes to us at times, rose within him suddenly and would not be resisted. He determined to break a long-lasting silence, to bare a wound that had lain close covered for forty years, to convince John that the sympathy he had to offer was not formal, but came from a heart whose right to sympathise lay in the fact that it too had suffered.

To this simple minded old man, the intended revelation seemed both solemn and pathetic: he could have made it to no one else, he could have made it in no other circumstances. So direful an emergency demanded recognition, it should be greeted with the costliest sacrifice he had to make. Assuming, quite unconsciously, that set expression of lofty gloom (worn only upon most solemn occasions) which, unknown to himself, had earned him the reputation of being "gey bonnie at a funeral"—Mr. Ferris awaited his young friend's return. Footsteps

were heard at length, entering the house and thereafter the kitchen. Mr. Ferris turned out his lamp very deliberately, stalked down the passage, and presented himself at the door of the fire-lit room.

John Cayford lifted his vacant gaze from the glowing fire to the minister's face, and in an instant his inert faculties, stung into activity, warned him that sympathy was about to be offered and roused themselves to defend him from it. The very thought of it was utterly intolerable to him. He was determined to prevent it from finding expression, yet for the moment he could think of nothing to say. With an odd mingling of apprehension and fascination, he watched Mr. Ferris draw forward a chair to the fire side and slowly seat himself.

"John, my poor lad——"

"My dear sir, there is no need to be alarmed on my account, I have been wet through scores of times without taking any harm. I suppose the daily walk to and from Garleigh in all weathers and for so many years, has hardened

me: I have not had a day's illness since I was a child."

"No: you are strong, you are certainly strong. I was not thinking of your health: there are worse ills than bodily ailments. There are wounds——"

"I have heard you declare again and again, sir, that good health is the greatest of all blessings."

"Ay, lad, whenever I am out of health that is my conviction. I have been thinking over the past this evening, John."

"Have you, sir?" He felt slightly relieved by this apparent change of subject.

"Forty years ago, John, when I was about your own age, I too, had an experience——"

"And have you had news about it this evening, sir, in that letter?"

Mr. Ferris looked down at his hand in some astonishment. Mr. Forester's communication was there; he must have taken it unconsciously from his table when he left the study.

"This"—he said hastily, "this refers to—to

another matter." His obvious confusion indicated the nature of the other matter.

"To Mary's engagement, perhaps."

"Well, yes—to that. It is from her uncle. Did she mention it to you?"

"She told me of her engagement, not of the letter. Am I to see it?"

"Why, the fact is"—said Mr. Ferris, fumbling for his eyeglasses, his thoughts effectually detached from the past for the time being, "I brought it here with me quite unintentionally, not thinking you would care—still, it is an astonishing letter in some respects. I am not sure that I altogether understand it yet, Kate not being at hand—ah! here they are, now we shall see."

He perched the glasses astride his nose, and read the letter through aloud, very slowly, pausing at the end of each sentence to peer over the glasses at his auditor. Long before its close, he had become absorbed in it to the exclusion of every other train of thought.

"—desires to marry Mary soon, and hinted at most liberal settlements: but these are points

which you and he will no doubt discuss when you meet.'—A very astonishing letter, as I said."

"What do you propose to do about it, sir?"

"Do? I? Why I don't see that there is anything to be done, until the young man comes here himself."

"You are not going to make any enquiries?"

"Well, Mary has no money of her own, you see: would it be—becoming?"

"Most certainly it would. I should say it is an imperative duty on your part. This 'estimable young man' is an entire stranger to you."

"Not to Mr. Forester."

"Who has known him for one year! You used not to have a very exalted opinion of Mr. Forester's judgment, Mr. Ferris."

"Really, John, your memory is inconvenient."

There was silence for a few minutes, during which Mr. Ferris twitched the letter nervously between his fingers. This interview was to have been solemnly confidential; so far from

receiving confidences, he was now receiving advice. He felt himself to be relapsing into that state of dazed weariness, from which excitement had for a time withdrawn him; the old wretched sense of helpless feebleness began to reassert itself.

“A church member”—he said dejectedly.

“My dear sir, I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but that is *not* a sufficient guarantee.”

The minister sighed.

“It should be, it should be. You think then, I must make enquiries of this Mr. Claverton? I so rarely go to Glasgow now—time was, when I thought as little of the journey as Kate does. She goes for me, and sees to my business as well as any one could. Perhaps”—with a suggestion of returning hopefulness in his tone, “Kate could hardly——?”

“No, sir, Kate certainly could not.”

“Of course not—quite out of the question! Still——”

“If you feel unable to see Mr. Claverton yourself, sir, authorise me to do so for you.”

“You, John! My dear lad, there is no one

who could do it better. I should feel most relieved, most grateful: but it is too much to ask."

"I don't know why. You may be sure I shall look after Mary's interests. As it happens, I have business with this same firm. A young fellow who died on board the 'Curlew,' entrusted some affairs to me which I have neglected: I shall go up to Glasgow to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

"And start by the early train," continued John, his plans shaping themselves rapidly. "It doesn't stop at Garleigh, I know, but it is due at Laurieston at 5.10: the walk is nothing—I can easily do it in an hour and a half. If I wait for the second train, it will be twelve before I reach town."

"You will start soon after three!"

"At half past three; it is quite light then. I shall have to leave the back door unbolted, but you won't mind that. I had better put my things together and get an hour's sleep. Good-night, sir."

He was gone, sighing with relief that all attempts at consolation had been baffled.

Mr. Ferris stared blankly at the empty room : his hands trembled, his face was flushed.

"I have lived too long," he said, forlornly, "it is time I went, to make room for younger folks who are accustomed to all this hurry and rush. There is no repose about any one, now. What a day !—Kate flying after everything but her own business, Mary getting herself engaged to a perfect stranger and confusing us all, John proposing to upset the household at three o'clock in the morning ! It would be far better for him to take his breakfast quietly with the rest of us at a reasonable hour, and hear what more Mary has to say." His glance rested on the socks and stockings he had arranged so carefully, and the sight of them revived the thoughts that had prompted him to put them there. "I understand, I understand !" soliloquised the kind old man, "he wishes to avoid seeing her so soon. Very natural, very right : just what I should have done myself in the same circumstances. Ah, me !"

He continued for a time to draw parallels between his own experience and John's. The kitchen clock striking one, aroused him from a brief doze. He would not admit to himself that he had slept: forty years ago he had been bereft of both sleep and appetite for a time, and now, wakefulness seemed to him an appropriate tribute to pay to the claims of past and present grief. He replenished the fire, fetched his Chinese statistics and his Bible, and with their aid defied Morpheus for two weary hours.

When John re-entered the kitchen shortly after three, he was dismayed to find it still tenanted. The fire crackled with aggressive cheerfulness, the table was spread with a profusion of eatables, Mr. Ferris was in the act of pouring out tea.

"Try and force yourself to take something," he said solemnly; "it will be so much better for you."

"My appetite never requires any forcing, sir, thank goodness!"

It was impossible, even for Mr. Ferris, to

allude to matters of sentiment, while scones were vanishing with such unromantic despatch; he reserved himself, therefore, to the moment of parting. It came. He walked down to the Manse gate with his young friend, maintaining a look of intense commiseration, and thinking over several sentences that would convey in a few words all he wished to say. He was allowed no chance to utter them. John avoided the commiserating eyes—feigned not to notice the detaining hand held out to him.

“Thank you for all your kindness, sir,” he said, closing the gate behind him, “you shall hear from me immediately. I hope you will get some sleep now, you must need it. Good-bye.”

He was already at a distance, before Mr. Ferris realised that his last opportunity for bestowing his confidence had gone. He went back to the house, and mounted the stairs to his room very wearily. Sleep! It was easy enough for healthy inconsiderate young men, to talk about sleep as though one had but to close one's eyes to find it! Excited as he was by

such a confusion of puzzled thoughts, sleep was hopelessly out of the question for him. He lay down, to think the whole matter over calmly. A moment later, as it seemed, he found Kate beside him.

“Dear Uncle, are you awake at last? I could not make you hear. Have you been ill?”

“Ill, child, of course not! What do you want?”

“Breakfast has been waiting some time, sir. It is long past nine.”

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

LAURIESTON lay inland: the road thither, level for a mile or two, made an abrupt ascent of the steep Binnan Hills before wandering circuitously down their northern slope. Useful as this road had been in days when it afforded the only communication with Stranraer, it was now seldom frequented, and was generally spoken of as being tedious, tame, and unpicturesque save from one point.

There are those who must have their interest startled into activity, their sensibilities shocked into consciousness: human life, when it is not a series of convulsive throbs with the emotions in a state of volcanic eruption, is a dull and insipid affair; similarly, the beauties of nature are hardly worth notice unless mountains tower and precipices yawn, unless the sun flames into the sky glories unspeakable or night descends in a darkness that may be felt; to such, the

Laurieston road, even at its best point and in most favourable circumstances, would have appeared hopelessly commonplace. There are others who listen to the laughter of children with keen pleasure, and find the study of monotonous life absorbing; they are thrilled by the scent of the wild rose, the crooning of the wood pigeon, the curved outline of some low-lying range of hills, or the shadow cast upon the moor by a drifting cloud: to these, every foot of the Laurieston road would have seemed rich in beauty. But John Cayford, at present on his way from Feldrossan, was neither one who dazzled his eyes with great effects nor strained them after small ones. He belonged to that very large class of persons who, from incapacity, indolence, or distrust of their own powers, are content to take their ideals of beauty and truth in nature and art at second-hand, exercising their own judgment only in that narrow sphere of daily occupation where they are compelled to think for themselves to a certain extent. They thus become dependent for their illumination on the degree in which

the spirit of wisdom and revelation has been vouchsafed to their neighbours: unless beauty is shewn to them they remain blind to it; they see most clearly through the eyes of those they love best, and if the light that is in those eyes be darkness it is indeed a luckless thing.

Mary had caressed a rose and touched its petals with her lips—the beauty and value of roses was thereafter an established fact in her lover's mind: she had interpreted for him the voices of the sea—he would now always understand their mirth or mourning: intellectually she had done nothing for him, being much his inferior in intellectual power; but she had given him a revelation of priceless worth (than which there is no more effectual enlightener of the eyes of the heart) she let him look into a beautiful soul. She herself thought it full of blemishes; to the less clear spiritual vision of those around her it appeared to be almost without flaw, so ardent was her love for goodness, so foreign to her were the evil thoughts with which most of us are familiar. It is given to few to be gifted as Mary was, to be placed as

she had been in an environment so absolutely favourable to growth in grace ; but there are women so gifted and so environed ; and to my thinking it is they who, unconsciously, uphold for us that lofty ideal of purity to which all good men and all good women pay homage.

Save at one point, the Laurieston road was unconnected with Mary in John Cayford's mind ; it was to him therefore, save at this one point, nothing more than " a public way for travelling." The point to which reminiscences clung, he approached with dread ; for whereas Mr. Ferris on setting himself to " think things over," had immediately lost sight of them all, he, with the firmest determination not to let his mind dwell on these same things, was persistently haunted by them. No matter to how great a distance he projected his thoughts, they converged without delay to the forbidden centre. If he looked toward Melbourne, a vision of the house that was to have been Mary's home confronted him ; if he turned his attention to business matters, the reason why he had no longer any special cause to desire success became instantly apparent—

the painless blissful reign of Apathy being over, Memory held him in a torturing grasp.

A beautiful view presented itself to the pedestrian who, after some stress of lung and limb, gained the summit of the Binnan Hills and turned to face the path up which he had climbed. Feldrossan lay far below, yet not so far but that its houses and the groups of rocks along its shore were clearly discernible: from that shore the sea stretched itself out—beyond Ailsa, beyond Arran, beyond Cantyre—out, out, until it met a dull blue line upon the horizon, the coast of Ireland. This was the view which was generally held to redeem the Laurieston road from mediocrity: to Mary's lover it was so intimately connected with herself, that he approached it with dread and yet with desire—as we fear and yet long to see the representation of a face once dear and now lost to us, longing to revive the memory of past pleasure, fearing to intensify the misery of present pain. There was not the slightest necessity for him to look back upon Feldrossan, common sense dictated that he should not risk adding vividness to im-

pressions already too vivid : his only reasonable course was to walk straight on without sending so much as one glance, however fleeting, behind him. This reasonable course he intended to pursue. He reached the summit, wavered, halted, turned—and stood there, gazing upon the Manse and the rocks and the sea until further delay was impossible. As an immediate result of this indiscretion, he began to look into the future with renewed hopefulness. Why should he be so ready to relinquish long-cherished plans? Enquiry might prove Gavin Wishart to be a most unsatisfactory character. Mr. Forester was enthusiastic about him, but in old days Mr. Forester had frequently been described by his brother-in-law as one of those hopelessly hopeful individuals whose illusions it is almost impossible to dispel : the present might be a case of illusion. On Mr. Claverton's judgment complete reliance could be placed, application must be made to him forthwith. He reached town, waited impatiently at his hotel until the morning was further advanced, and then went to the solicitor's place of busi-

ness. As he was shewn through the outer office to an inner apartment, it occurred to him to wonder, which of the young men at the desks he passed, was Mark Presslie—all unconscious of approaching fate.

Mr. Claverton confirmed Mr. Forester's eulogy and added to it. His knowledge of Gavin Wishart was of very long standing, he said; he had known of him all his life, and had been intimately acquainted with him for ten or twelve years; he believed there were few young men more honourable, amiable, and generous, with higher principles and more refined tastes.

"If you apply to Dr. Forbes of St. Martin's, whose opinion will probably carry more weight with Mr. Ferris than mine, he will endorse every word I have said," concluded Mr. Claverton.

But the enquiry was pursued no further. The list of virtues was overpowering, and roused an entirely unreasonable resentment in John Cayford's mind against these good qualities in the abstract and Gavin Wishart as their concrete representation. It was necessary to acquaint Mr. Ferris with the result of the inter-

view. John wrote a note and despatched it; consulted a shipping list, found that the "Curlew" was advertised to leave in ten days' time, and decided to sail in her if the settlement of Alan's affairs did not detain him. Mr. Anderson was to be back, he had learnt, on the following Monday at latest.

But how were the intervening days to be passed? He considered the question as he stood at his window, looking idly out upon the crowded street. Suddenly he caught a glimpse of a girlish figure in the distance: it seemed familiar, his pulses quickened, the blood flew into his face: people passed before her hiding her from sight, he leaned forward to watch breathlessly for her reappearance, the crowd parted, she came into view again—the illusion vanished! The insanity of supposing for an instant that Mary could be there!

"In heaven's name," he apostrophised himself, "find something to do!"

He remembered the papers given into his charge by Alan Twiss; the examination of these would be a sufficiently prosaic employ-

ment. He sought for the box, and as he took it in his hands a wonderfully vivid recollection of its dead owner came to him: he paused a moment while Alan's words, tones of voice, looks, gestures, recalled themselves—he lived again through every incident of the arrival at Santa Cruz—he felt afresh the overwhelming pity for the poor lad that had filled his heart then. Opening the box, he commenced his investigations.

On the surface lay the three letters written by Mark Presslie, these he studied most carefully before setting them aside. Below them was a sealed envelope, directed to Richard Twiss, Esq., Dean Street, Glasgow. Underneath lay the forged receipt, enclosed in a slip of paper containing Mr. Anderson's private address. Next, came a package of accounts and newspapers cuttings labelled, "Memoranda of my Brother's dealings with me: and details of the sale for £6000 of our property in Braehead Street"; this he did not stay to examine. Finally he drew forth two flat pieces of cardboard, bound together and sealed;

the name "Mary" was faintly traced upon them. His interest quickened. He looked again within the box, nothing remained : unless some clue to the young lady's identity lay here, there was none. For some instants he hesitated, then he cut the tape. It seemed to him as though a strange stillness fell suddenly upon the room, deadening every sound but the painful thud, thud, thud, of his heart. The boards fell apart; from between them a sheet of stiff paper slid face-downwards on to the table, and had it been a sheet of lead it could not have cost a greater effort to lift it. He made the effort. Before him lay the sketch of a young girl's head, boldly drawn, life like: the identity of Alan's "Mary" was revealed: the face that had lived in his own heart for years and would not be banished now, looked up at him—it wanted but colour to be a perfect representation of Mary Forester. The prosaic papers that were to have engrossed his attention were unceremoniously thrust aside, common sense and resolution might clamour in vain; he saw his reasonable course, as he had

seen it that morning on the Binnan Hills, and he paid as little heed to it: for long he gazed upon the lovely face, perfectly well aware that present gratification must be paid for at a heavy rate and that every fraction of the purchase money would be demanded.

When the day closed he left the hotel and walked eastward, with no object but to divert his thoughts. He passed a church through the open door of which the sound of music issued, impulse led him within. Probably a service was not long over, for the building was nearly empty. The organist was practising. He played a Prelude of Bach's, pausing now and again to repeat a difficult bar; John listened with gradually deepening interest as one difficulty after another was met and overcome. Presently classical ground was deserted: Humphrey Stark's "*Prière*" was rendered twice, the player indulging himself on the second occasion with a brilliant improvisation of weird harmonies between the opening and closing theme. He changed the character of the piece entirely—there was no prayer, but a

muttering of curses in the volume of sullen sound that rose out of the depths to fling itself in defiance against the gates of heaven, and then stormed and wailed and sobbed down into moody silence, destroying even the peace of the closing phrases. It was fitting that the musician wandered into the plaintive melody of a Berceuse by Kinross, lulling all troubled thoughts and stormy sounds to rest. His next effort was more elaborate and less interesting.

The seat beside John, hitherto empty, was now occupied by a young man who had brought music with him and was studying it. A glance at his face shewed it to be singularly attractive; it lacked strength, perhaps, but the features were beautiful—delicacy, culture, refinement, expressed themselves in every line. The newcomer seemed entirely absorbed in his study, never lifting his eyes from the page, and whispering an emphatic "Excellent, excellent," to himself when the performance pleased him specially. At its conclusion, he laid down his score and went forward to speak with the organist. Lights were being put out, John rose

to leave : as he passed the music he noticed the initials G. W. and an address written boldly across the cover.

“I am fanciful enough to imagine anything to-night,” he reflected with some impatience : “I could swear that that writing is perfectly familiar to me, and I cannot possibly have seen it before. It is an uncommon hand, too.”

When he reached his room, he began mechanically to empty his coat pockets. The first thing he drew out was a large envelope addressed to Mary Forester : he wondered to find it in his possession, until, noting traces of mud on one side and of damp on the other, he recollected having found it at the Manse gate the night before.

“I know this handwriting, at all events,” he asserted, and held it nearer to the light : the initials G. W. were in one corner. He dropped the paper as though it had been on fire, no doubt remained as to the identity of Mary’s correspondent. “But how *can* I know his writing so well?” he questioned slowly. “I have certainly seen it quite lately : where? . . . In

church this evening, of course, on the music. . . . But I knew it then, I had seen it before that : where ? where ? ”

Light flashed on him. He tossed the papers out of the box, unfolded Mark Preslie’s letters and held one of them beside Mary’s envelope—the writing on both was identical, stroke for stroke, letter for letter. He stared at them until they became blurred and misty.

“I must have some sleep,” he decided at last : “I am too tired now to think or see clearly.”

It was easy to reckon on sleep, but the moment he lay down it fled from him. He found himself hopelessly wide awake, tormented by questions, hurried involuntarily through mazes of thought : so far from being too tired to think, he was too tired to keep from thinking.

How came those two men to write so exactly alike ? Numbers of handwritings resemble each other. But this was a case of identity, not of resemblance ; and the style of writing was so uncommon, it must be the work of one person. But the names were different ! To change one’s name was not an unheard-of pro-

ceeding. But Gavin Wishart was said to be amiable, generous, high-principled; whereas Mark Presslie was a thief and a forger and a coward. Good reason for *him* to change his name. Suppose he had changed it, to Gavin Wishart—what then? “Oh, this is intolerable nonsense!” groaned John. “Mr. Claverton has known the man all his life. Why can I not sleep?”

Toward morning sleep came to him, and he would gladly have shaken it off, for it was less endurable than wakefulness.

This was not Glasgow, it was Santa Cruz. He was standing on the Mole, alone but for that still figure seated beside him. Alan’s eyes were wide open, they had in them a fiercely questioning look. What was it they were trying to say? “Tell me, Alan,” he heard his own voice ask, “who is Mark Presslie? Who is Mark Presslie?” and the dead man’s eyes said as plainly as words, “Who is Gavin Wishart? Who is Gavin Wishart?” He dared not meet those questioning eyes. He looked across the sea to Grand Canary. It had grown oddly

dwarfed and shrunk. It was not Grand Canary at all, but Arran: and this was not Tenerife, but the Feldrossan shore. Mary was beside him. "Oh, Mary dear, if you could have loved me! Only a little, dear; I would have been content with so little. I have loved you for fifteen years, Mary; how can I help loving you now? Lift up your eyes to me, why do you keep them turned away?" She lifts them up, and her eyes and her lips sob out the same question, "Who is Gavin Wishart? Who is Gavin Wishart?" And all the time there is some one sitting near. Some one with a book before him, who keeps nodding his head and saying, "Excellent! excellent!" every time the hateful question is asked. Then Mary's voice is drowned by a louder sound: is it the sea, or music? It grows louder, and louder; it must be an organ. No, it is not that either. It is a perfect roar of sound, and there is no music in it: but there are words. What are they? They grow more and more distinct. Thousands of voices are dinning into his ears the question—Who is Gavin Wishart? Who

is Ga—a—ah! He awakened himself with a shuddering cry, to hear the breakfast gong boom its summons through the hotel.

His dream had been of the peculiarly vivid kind that remains with the dreamer after he awakens, and transfers its own unreality to everything that surrounds him—it alone is real, all else is seeming. Occupied as he was by this phantasy, he seemed unable to grasp other thoughts. When he took up the morning paper, he almost expected to find in print the questions that were haunting him; he glanced at the various items of news without in the least comprehending them, even the Stock and Share List failed to rouse his interest. Of one certainty only was he conscious, he must, by some means, have these questions solved before another nightfall: to gain this end, he found the envelope Alan had directed to Richard Twiss, and then betook himself to Deane Street.

It did not surprise him in the least, rather he felt it to be altogether appropriate, that as he entered the office he should meet emerging

therefrom the young man who had been his neighbour in church on the previous evening. With an odd sense that his dream was being continued, he stood aside and watched him, as he was attended obsequiously to the door by a clerk, who observed in reply to some low spoken remark, "Yes indeed, Mr. Wishart, he looks very unwell."

"Excellent, excellent!" John found himself saying, "*that* is Gavin Wishart: but who is Mark Presslie?"

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD TWISS had returned to his office that Thursday morning, after an absence of ten days. He was still very weak and feeble, and one piece of intelligence given him with his letters added to his sense of helplessness: Mr. Gavin Wishart, who had called several times to see him, was to return this morning at 10.30, it was 10 o'clock now. Richard reminded himself of his doctor's order, strictly enjoined—"Avoid all worry and excitement," such a simple easy rule!

As he sat at his writing table, he let his glance wander listlessly from one to another of the familiar objects surrounding him; to-day they seemed strangely unfamiliar, he believed they must have been altered in some way during his absence, but the change was in himself not in them. He saw this, when he raised his eyes to meet those of his reflection looking down at him from the mirror in the centre recess: he

stared at his face in some dismay, the feebleness he feared was evidenced there. "Don't you lose your nerve, Dick," he implored himself in a low tone.

It was only recently that he had become subject to those attacks of excruciating pain, of which Gavin had witnessed one. Twiss was a coward where physical suffering was concerned, the mere apprehension of it reduced him at times to an extremity of terror; perhaps his experience was sufficiently awful to excuse him. It chanced that so far each attack had been preceded by the news of heavy loss in one of the many speculations into which he had plunged, and loss and agony were now inseparably connected in his mind. At present as there were many losses, he lived in a demoralizing state of fright, his mind was off the balance, he besought himself over and over again not to lose his nerve—his nerve, that had carried him triumphantly through a dozen crises, supplying a brilliant stratagem, a ready sentence, a bold affectation of innocence, with which to snatch him back from the verge of detection.

For the man was a scamp : he entertained no sentimental delusions on the subject, he knew his character perfectly well. It was to his interest that others should believe him to be a good man, generous, religious, worthy of implicit trust; and this was the impression that he had successfully created for years. But latterly, suspicions of him had been manifested in one or two directions, and he could not afford to be suspected. He redoubled his exertions, undergoing much trouble and inconvenience, undertaking many arduous and distasteful tasks, that he might retain his hold upon that section of the community which it was his object to deceive.

This suffering had not entered into his calculations—it maimed him, it paralysed him, it weakened his intellect. He had gradually allowed himself to become possessed with the idea, not infrequently cherished by the victims of pain, that reparation was due to him for the anguish he underwent, that a recompense for all his misery was his by right. No sooner was each cruel spasm over, than he began to dream

of the indemnification to come: to his fancy it took the shape of a sudden release from all his embarrassments, from all fear of loss and therefore of torture. Clearly his mind was unbalanced, he had never before looked outside himself for salvation.

There was a time-piece near him; it fascinated him to watch the minute hand creep stealthily down toward the half hour. He began to pity himself profoundly, surely Providence could not do less. Providence figured largely in his thoughts now: "Providence" was a pleasantly vague and impersonal term, with which he felt much more at his ease than with that other term—"God." He believed that in his present very critical situation he deserved at least as much pity as blame: it was not his choice to be left heir to a reputation that he had found himself quite unable to sustain without the aid of artifice, nor was it his choice to have among his clients a man with such superabundant wealth and such a foolishly confiding disposition as belonged to old Gavin Wishart. Without any special desire on his part, he had

been borne upon the shoulders of Circumstance into so prominent a position in the religious world, that Providence, for its own credit, was almost bound to maintain him there.

The half hour struck—his client was announced immediately thereafter.

Mr. Wishart appeared to have a good deal to say on matters unconnected with business; as he listened to him, Richard's excited apprehensions sank to rest.

"You need a change, you should take a holiday," Gavin urged, at last.

"Impossible," sighed the lawyer. "I cannot think of it. I am forced to go into the country until Monday; that must content me."

"Until Monday only? Three days are nothing. You should leave work altogether alone for a month."

"Ah, Mr. Wishart, you are about as practical as my doctor, who warns me to avoid everything in the shape of worry."

All the time, Gavin had been trying to persuade himself to mention his real errand. He was distressed by his companion's appearance,

which, now that it was so worn and haggard, was a much more powerful factor in promoting its owner's interests than it had been formerly. To ask awkward questions of a man who had been cautioned against worry seemed brutal, but what was to be done? From the moment of his entering the room, the impressions that had eluded him for days had begun to revive with something of their former intensity: he was afraid to act, yet he felt the imperative necessity for action. He rose to go, and lingered: moved toward the door, and came back again; and then began to speak with an embarrassment that was perfectly evident.

"By the way, could you—could you let me have another look at those 'Indigent' Bonds? I want to make a note of their numbers for future reference."

Richard rose without an instant's hesitation, turned to the safe, and began to search his pockets for the key.

"By all means," he said heartily. The embarrassment was entirely on Gavin's side, Twiss showed not the slightest trace of it. "I was

thinking only this morning," he continued, hunting in one pocket after another, "how extremely fortunate it is that we did not sell out when you—confound it all! I have left the key at home." He looked ruefully at Gavin, vexation and annoyance expressing themselves in every line of his face. "I *must* leave town this afternoon, or you might have seen them to-morrow: will you look in on Tuesday and I will have them out for you. That will be time enough, I suppose? I am afraid I cannot get back before Monday evening—unless I——"

"No, no: you are not to think of cutting short your holiday on my account," exclaimed Gavin, staggered by the readiness with which his proposal had been met. "Tuesday will do perfectly well, of course: pray don't look so concerned, the delay is of no consequence whatever."

"It is no holiday, or I could have put it off: it is a business engagement that I am obliged to keep. But I am almost certain that I could be here on Monday."

Gavin protested warmly against any alteration of plan being made.

“Well, well,” said Twiss, “we will wait until Tuesday, since you insist. This is unpardonable negligence on my part, but for my illness I should not know how to account for it. On Tuesday, then Mr. Wishart.”

Gavin left.

“Done there!” gasped Richard, “I’m done there! The money must be raised somehow; how? I don’t know where to look for it.”

He seized pen and paper and began to make rapid calculations, all his old energy roused within him by the excitement. Reaction came directly; he grew confused, his hand shook, he could neither make the figures clear nor count them.

“Damn you, Dick, you’ve lost your nerve!” he cried; flung down the pen in impotent rage, and stared blankly at the wretched, helpless face looking out at him from the mirror.

Suddenly he remembered what he had to dread. Here were anxiety and excitement and loss enough to bring it back at any moment! One hand pressed itself against his heart, the other clutched hold of the table, he shook in

every limb as one of those paroxysms of terror to which he was constantly giving way swept over him. He heard voices without, and as the door opened he drifted into the apathetic condition that so often follows a severe nervous strain. A card was brought to him. "Yes," he said slowly, "I will see Mr. Cayford."

In the momentary interval following, his hand groped its way to one of the pigeon holes before him and withdrew a paper—the intimation of Alan's death. He looked at certain notes pencilled by himself beneath John Cayford's signature: they referred to Messrs. Cazalet & Cayford, Melbourne, and to various London firms with which these gentlemen had dealings. Hope bestirred itself to overcome the fear in his heart; was Providence at last about to open a door of escape?

When his visitor entered, he motioned him to a seat, and examined the envelope tendered by him: it contained a bank note and a letter. He unfolded the note, convinced that he would find it to be of the value he required—it was for £50 only. He dropped it on to the table, and

listened, apparently without interest, to the explanation offered by its bearer of the way in which it had come into his possession. Hope, baffled in one direction, became more active in another. Richard began to question within himself how much or how little this newcomer could know of him, how much or how little it would be wise to disclose?

The curiosity with which John Cayford at first regarded Twiss, gave place instantly to sympathy: the worn face, the hopeless expression, the listless attitude, appealed effectively to a man who never recognized weakness without wishing to impart to it some of his own strength, nor saw distress without doing his utmost to alleviate it. Moreover, he had been unprepared to find here so striking a resemblance to Alan, a resemblance probably accentuated by ill health, for Suffering has her peculiar sign of kinship which she marks legibly in the eyes of her children. When the circumstances of Alan's death had been detailed, and Twiss, turning from the papers before him, looked questioningly at his visitor, John started, so

strangely did the gaze now meeting his resemble that by which he had been haunted throughout his dream. It seemed to him entirely without his volition that the words escaped him, "Who is Mark Presslie?"

"Mark Presslie!" repeated Richard wonderingly. "Why do you ask me about him?"

"Your brother spoke of him constantly. I thought he might not have heard of Alan's death."

"Yes, he has heard; I told him. Alan spoke of him as Mark Presslie, you say: he knew nothing, then, of his changed name and changed circumstances."

Changed name! Changed circumstances! The terrors of the night were returning. Mark Presslie was a thief and a forger and a coward. Good reason for him to change his name. Suppose he had changed it, to——

"And you, Mr. Cayford," pursued Richard, "surely you must be a stranger here to be ignorant of our young philanthropist, our patron of arts and charities, formerly a fellow clerk of my brother's, now a man of fortune."

"Practically I am a stranger. Tell me the name."

"Gavin Wishart."

John leaned back in his chair, his mind filled with one thought, Mary! Mary looking up at him with tearful eyes and trembling lips, Mary sobbing out the question—Who is Gavin Wishart? Turn your eyes away, Mary, I can't answer you.

"I am greatly indebted to you for your kindness to my brother," Twiss was saying. "You spoke of having been with him when he died. Did he suffer pain?"

"None, none at all: there could not have been a more peaceful death."

"Ah, I am glad. Pain is a dreadful thing, it makes such cowards of us. I speak from experience. I suffer much."

"I can see that," said John compassionately, rousing himself to consider Twiss, "you look ill. If you want more information from me about your brother, I had perhaps better come at some other time when you are feeling stronger."

“I beg you to stay! I have—there are—I must ask you about Alan. Poor lad, poor misguided lad! Did he speak to you of his wrong doing? Did he shew any signs of sorrow?”

“He was innocent. Believe me, the suspicions against him were unfounded.”

“He told you so, of course. They were well founded, too well founded. He died, then, unrepentant, with a lie on his lips. My poor brother! I have never ceased to reproach myself. I ought to have been lenient, forbearing; instead, I wrote Alan a cruel, heartless letter” (of which, reflected Richard, you have certainly heard). “No one knows how the catastrophe shocked me, how I suffered when I thought of his disgrace. That suffering left its mark, it could not fail to do so; I contracted then the disease that will kill, when it is tired of torturing.” He raised his hand to his heart, and then dropped it, as though that slight exertion were too much for him. He had uttered sentence after sentence very slowly, in a dreary monotone with sad eyes persistently fixed upon his listener: the slow speech seemed the result of weakness,

the sad eyes expressed nothing but hopeless sorrow.

John debated. With one sentence he could clear Alan's name; he was urgently prompted to give voice to it and lighten the weight of grief by which Twiss seemed to be crushed: unfortunately, that sentence would incriminate Presslie. What he had undertaken, was to place the evidence he held in Mr. Anderson's hands, and until this was done he believed himself bound to be silent. He might not do more than look his sympathy. Richard's eyes, meeting his, grew suddenly eager.

"Mr. Cayford, why were you so kind to my brother? What claim had he on you?"

"He was in distress."

"Do you always help the distressed?"

"When I can."

"Then you will help me," asserted Richard; his slow utterance giving place to a rapid torrent of words. "You will help me, because it is in your power, and because I am in such distress as Alan never knew. When a man's life is at stake he has no time to think of conven-

tionality: with me, more than life is at stake, I am forced to throw myself on your mercy. I dare this, because I know that, whatever else you do, you will not betray my confidence—my instinct never misled me yet. No, no, don't interrupt me: I must speak, you must listen! Until two years ago my position was unassailable, my reputation was without tarnish, I was envied. Since then, since I wrote that cruel letter to Alan, I have met with nothing but calamity: my undertakings have failed, death has robbed me of the friends who would have helped me, envy has triumphed over my losses, venomous tongues have been busy with my reputation—in consequence my business has suffered. Just now there is fresh disaster. *I dare not let it be known*: I speak openly to you, Mr. Cayford, the faintest rumour of it would be fatal to me. All that went before was misfortune; this is worse. Looking back, I can scarcely understand how it came about; and yet I can, for, at the time when steady nerves and a clear head were absolutely indispensable, I fell a victim to this paralysing pain

that almost kills me with terror before it comes and with agony while it lasts—small wonder if my judgment is impaired! Not long ago I was unexpectedly called upon to meet a claim for £2000. I had not the money at my command, though I expected to have it in a few days; but that exact sum, belonging to a charitable society of which I have for years been treasurer, lay to my credit in a bank. I withdrew it, and met the claim. The money has not been replaced. Renewed loss, renewed illness, have overtaken me since. Still, I believed I had time: in ordinary circumstances, the directors would not meet before August. I have an enemy among them, a man I once convicted of unfair dealing. It was he who pressed the claim that drove me to such extremities: he has now incited one of the younger directors, whose wealth gives him influence, to urge an immediate application of this £2000. For ten days I have been absent through illness, unable to attend to business; this morning, I learn that the directors are to meet on Saturday. The money must be forthcoming. I have good enough security to offer;

I could borrow it readily if I had time to go to a distance for it, but here, where I am watched by unfriendly eyes, I dare not run the risk of having it known that I have raised such a sum. An aggravation of my difficulty lies in the fact that an hour hence I am forced to leave Glasgow to meet a business engagement in the country, and there is no possibility of my return before to-morrow afternoon, or evening. I have no time. I am driven desperate. Mr. Cayford, you can aid me; will you?"

"You mean, will I lend you £2000!"

"I have said I have good security to offer: I do not ask you to risk your money, I ask you to rescue me."

John's sympathy had cooled considerably, as that sentiment is apt to when required to express itself in cash.

"What makes you confident that I have such a sum at my command?"

"This," said Richard, handing him the sheet of pencilled memoranda.

He read the notes in silence, and with considerable surprise.

"And why," he asked, "do you not rather apply to your prince of philanthropists, your young man of fortune?"

"Mr. Wishart," responded Richard promptly, "is the director who has been instigated to urge the disposal of the money. He was here this morning; it was from him that I, incidentally, learned my danger. I dare not let him know."

"You seem to have lost sight of the fact that you are a stranger to me."

"Ah, yes," exclaimed Twiss bitterly, "a stranger, of course! And Mr. Wishart would have found means to convey the same hint had I applied to him. A needy man finds strangers everywhere."

For the first time since he had begun to speak he withdrew his persistent gaze from his companion: excitement was dying down again, listlessness and languor again creeping over him. Almost indifferent to the result of his appeal, he turned to his table and began mechanically to set his papers in order. The unfamiliar look of one of them stirred vague

wonder within him; it was that in which Alan's banknote had been folded. He read the words on it, and failed clearly to comprehend them. Acting as he would not have done had his faculties been fully alert, he pushed forward the paper for explanation.

Alan had written thus:

I return the £50 you so generously paid to save our honoured name from disgrace. I could not understand your haste to believe me guilty until information reached me respecting the sale of our Braehead Street property: now I understand. It may be some satisfaction to you to know that *I* have not been the one to bring disgrace on our name. I am innocent, as the proofs my friend holds will testify.

ALAN TWISS.

Upon this missive John bestowed the closest attention. He was hampered by the slow moving of thoughts that groped their way laboriously forward from point to point. Their current was changed. The impulse to exonerate Alan by enlightening Richard, had altogether gone from him: instead, he was conscious of an unaccountably strong desire to keep Richard in darkness, at all events for a

season. The imperative necessity to gain an interval for reflection, urged itself upon him.

Twiss repeated his question—

“Is there truth in what he says? are there such proofs?”

“There is truth in it, I have the papers: but you spoke just now of an immediate engagement—I, too, am pressed for time. Come to see me to-morrow on your return to town, we can then talk at our leisure over your brother’s affairs and your own.”

Eagerness flashed back momentarily into Richard’s eyes.

“You will lend——”

“I pledge myself to nothing. I will think of it. The delay cannot signify, since you say you can take no steps before your return. I am staying at the Central; at what hour will you come?”

They arranged to meet at 7 on the following evening.

When he was once more alone, Richard indulged in retrospection. He was excessively wearied, and his mind in its backward glance

refused, for lack of energy, to recognise any grounds for apprehension: it saw only what it wished to see—the Finger of Providence interposing to avert ruin. The vision braced him, invigorated him. As he looked steadily at it, it grew more clear, more irresistibly powerful; it spread itself before him until it left no room for doubt, foreboding, terror. His nerves were steadied. He began with some complacency to make preparation for that business engagement in the country of which he had spoken—a solitary thread of fact in the morning's web of fiction.

CHAPTER III.

No such beneficent vision was with John Cayford. The confusion in the crowded streets through which he passed, was as order when compared to the confusion in his mind. He envied now the uncertainty that had been so intolerable to him a few hours before : certainty had come, and with it had come chaos.

How was he to act ? Gavin Wishart was in his power ; he had but to produce his proofs in order to secure the downfall of that estimable young man. Was there room for hesitation ? Alan's imploring tones rang in his ears—"I will have this disgrace wiped out. Promise me that if I die before I reach home, you will see these papers of mine placed in Mr. Anderson's hands, and my name cleared. Swear it !" He had sworn it ; he was in honour bound ; he had no choice at all. The papers (he had reached the hotel by this time, and they were spread before him), must be given to Mr. Anderson on

Monday next, and at the same time Richard Twiss must be made aware of their purport: the obligation was inviolable.

The shipping list he had consulted yesterday, attracted his notice, while his fingers searched within the box for the portrait that lay there: what need was there, after all, for such desperate haste in booking his passage to Melbourne? The portrait was uncovered, he looked at it with a hopefulness that was fierce in its intensity. Memory dealt him suddenly a cruel stab. "Do you love him, Mary?" "More than I can tell you, John!" That was her confession, uttered low, uttered with all her heart. What if disgrace to Gavin should mean heart-break to her! Had there been a fire in the room, he would have pitched the papers into it.

Heart-break? Girls' hearts are not so soon broken.

But Mary was like no other girl: she was so fragile, so easily crushed, so unfit to meet misery. Think of the terror in her eyes when she had once spoken of the dread of coming trouble! A harsh word was enough to make

her heart bleed. He had seen her cry, he could not endure the thought of her tears. Was the obligation so inviolable?

There was another point of view: to cause her suffering now might be the only way to spare her much pain in the future. He seized on this idea with avidity, and elaborated it. She would be revolted by the disclosure; her love for Gavin would not survive such a shock, she would forget soon—she was so young, so impressionable. And then—then!

An overpowering desire to see her again took instant possession of him: why should he not gratify it? After he had seen her he would be in a better position to decide his course of action. A hundred thoughts surged upward in his mind to convince him that it was impossible to act at all in the matter until he had seen her. There was need of haste, too some definite conclusion must be arrived at before the coming interview with Richard Twiss. Half an hour later, he was whirling South in the mid-day train.

Doubt as to the wisdom of his procedures

lurked in his mind, and with it grew a dread that he might not find Mary alone. Doubt and dread were put to flight when he learned at the Feldrossan Manse that Mr. Ferris was absent, attending a monthly meeting of ministers held on this occasion at Glenessle, and that Kate also was away.

As when he had first seen her, he found Mary gathering roses: but then she had knelt before a grave to pluck off dead flowers and withered leaves, now her hands were filled with glowing spoils from the famous Manse rose trees: then, tears had filled the eyes that were now shining with happiness. At sight of her visitor the happiness grew vivid, she flew forward to greet him.

“ Ah, John, I could not believe that you had gone away without saying good-bye to me! I was certain you would come back in a day or two: Uncle said not, but I knew better. How glad I am that no one else is at home, we can have a lovely long talk. If you had only been here yesterday you would have seen Gavin!”

They wandered to the far end of the garden

and seated themselves there. She was beside him! That supreme fact blotted every other out of existence. The urgent need to decide some course of action no longer made itself felt: it was impossible to feel anything but a dizzy sense of her nearness. Mary talked gaily, while she arranged her roses. She had so much to say about Gavin, that the irresponsiveness of her companion passed without notice. Gavin was so generous, so universally liked, so clever. Music, it appeared, was his chief delight: he knew so much about it, he even wrote it! Last Sunday, the anthem sung at St. Martin's was his: it began with the words "He came to deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage"—a minor recitative, she hummed a few bars in low sweet tones—and it ended with a full chorus, "Death is swallowed up in victory!" John heard her words as though they had been spoken to him through a dream. He recalled them later; but at the time he was conscious only of the music of her voice, her beauty, her grace.

The day was sultry; heat haze hung over the

sea and the Binnan hills, the sun shone through it with subdued splendour. Trees made a welcome shade about them, screening even the Manse from view. There was stillness in the air; bees droned their way from flower to flower, slowly, heavily; through the stillness came with ceaseless regularity the dull thud of waves upon the shore.

“What do the waves say to-day, Mary?”

“What everything says now; that I am the happiest girl in all creation! John, he is so good!”

“Is he? Why do you think that?”

“I don’t *think* it—I feel it, I know it, I see it in his face when I look at him.”

“Looks are no guide. Suppose I were to prove to you that he is not trustworthy.”

She gazed at him in astonishment, and then laughed.

“You are jesting. You say that to tease me; of course I would not believe you.”

“It is you who are jesting now! Would my word go for nothing in spite of all the years that you have known me?”

"I can't think what you mean," she said; "you puzzle me, I am not clever. You know that you are always my very dear John, and of course I believe every word you say—except—except when you speak of people that I know better than you can."

"You think this man perfect, then."

"N-no. I daresay he has faults; but not so many as I have."

"Your faults! What are they, I wonder."

"Oh, John, I am most frightfully tiresome! I know I must try Kate's temper very much and if Uncle *had* a temper I should vex him too. You see, I am so careless and stupid, I don't do anything well. There is my class in the Sunday School—I don't seem to teach the children properly, they never answer questions as Kate's do! The time is all spent in kissing them, and telling them stories: I am quite sure that if Uncle were not the Superintendent I should not be allowed to have a class. Then there are accounts: I *can't* keep accounts, I never get them right. And as for writing letters—Kate generally has to tell me what to

say ! Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid Gavin will be dreadfully disappointed when he comes to know me better."

"So these are your faults ! You never stole money, I suppose ; or told lies, or acted them."

Her face coloured crimson.

"John, I *did* act a lie, just the other day. It was the evening that—that Gavin told me he loved me. I was staying with the Foresters, you know, and Agnes and I shared a room. And when we went upstairs I did so want to have a quiet time to think—but she would keep talking, she would not be quiet for a minute, and I knew that instead of going to sleep she would talk half the night through : so—I knelt down and pretended, yes *pretended*, to say my prayers, and all the while I was repeating to myself over and over again what Gavin had said to me."

"And that seems a great crime to you !"

"It was a dreadful thing to do. I am ashamed whenever I think of it. I have not even told Gavin, yet."

"If you think that so dreadful, what would

you say of a man who had stolen money and let the blame rest on another?"

She looked at him with dilating eyes; trying her best to fathom such depths of iniquity.

"I don't know for which of the poor things I should feel more sorry. It would be hateful, of course, for the man who was suspected: but it would be worse for the man who stole the money—yes, I should pity him more."

"Then what would you say if I shewed you proofs that Mr. Wishart had done such a thing?"

She laughed gleefully.

"I don't know what has come to you, John! Why do you talk in such a ridiculous fashion? Gavin *could* not do anything like that: besides he is rich, he never needed money."

"But suppose I had proofs here, just now, and could shew them to you? Think Mary, what you would do."

"Ah, you are talking as Kate does when we have discussions: she says, 'For the sake of argument, suppose so and so happened.' Do you mean 'For the sake of argument'?"

“Yes, for the sake of argument : think Mary, I want you to think.”

She knit her brows, clasped her hands, and gazed severely at the roses. Presently she turned to him with a question.

“John, may I ask you something?”

“Anything, Mary.”

“All the years that you were away from home, did you never meet any one that you liked, that you *loved*?”

“I met many that I liked ; none, there, that I loved.”

She made a despairing gesture.

“Then I don’t see how I am to make you understand ! If you had ever loved, you would know at once : if ever you do love, John, you will know.”

“I will know what?”

“What I want to try and tell you. You say, Suppose Gavin had done something very wrong (which of course he has not), what would I do? John, if a woman admires a man, only, it may be for the sake of the things he does, or has done ; but when she *loves* him, it is not for

what he did, or does, or ever will do—it is for himself. It is not what other people see in him, or say of him, that she loves—it is himself: and if the whole world were to join in saying wicked things about him, she would not care. It would make no difference to her love!”

“But if proofs were brought?”

“Proofs! You mean, writing on paper, reports of what this and that person said? You might bring me volumes of ‘proofs’ against Gavin, and I would laugh at them! I have something that cannot be disproved. I believe, I feel, I *know*, down here in my heart, that he is good: I love him, that is enough for me.”

“You are unreasonable, Mary. Would nothing convince you? If every one held aloof from him, if he were openly disgraced—would that make no difference? What would you do then?”

She looked at him with terror in her eyes.

“Oh, I should die! No, no—I would live to comfort him. If others left him, I would cling closer; if others despised him, I would encourage him by my trust; if he were robbed

of every other love in the world, I would love him ten times more dearly than before that he might never feel his loss." She paused; she leaned toward him, clasping her hands on his arm. "Think, John, it is your turn to think now. If you loved a girl with your whole heart and soul, and believed in her truth and goodness, and knew that she loved you—would any number of written papers and cruel speeches shake your love? Love!—ah, if you had felt it, you would understand! I am unreasonable, you say: reason has not anything to do with it." Her voice sank low. "My love for Gavin, John, is—is *me*. It lives with my life: it *is* my life: nothing can change it—nothing!"

He sat stupefied, while despair strangled hope in his heart.

Feeling her fingers relax their pressure on his arm, he covered her hands with one of his own, so as to keep the clinging grasp still there. Look at her, he dared not: remain silent, he dared not.

"Mary," he said hurriedly, "there is a message I undertook to deliver to you, from some

one who died lately. Alan Twiss, his name was: do you remember him?"

"Alan Twiss? No, John. Who was he?"

"You must have met him two or three years ago. In Glasgow probably. A young fellow, tall, and dark. He went abroad in ill health."

"Oh, I think I do remember: yes, I remember him distinctly now, I used to meet him at Mr. Anderson's. A message for me, you say?"

"He was wrongly accused of having stolen money. He thought you had heard of it. He wanted you to know that he was innocent."

"I am very glad. But I did not hear of it; I had forgotten him, until you reminded me. Why should he have sent the message to me?"

"He remembered you, you see. He could not bear to have you think ill of him: he—he loved you, Mary."

"Loved me? Oh, no, you must be mistaken."

"I am not mistaken."

"It is very strange," she said.

He laughed unsteadily.

"Very strange, that a man should love you:

very strange! And he—is not the only one. I”—he started to his feet, thrusting aside her hands—“I must go, Mary. God keep you happy. This is good-bye; for the last time; I shall not see you again.”

He turned away from her. He had not taken a dozen steps before he was arrested.

“Stay, John,” she cried imploringly. “I want you, I need you; ah, don’t go! What have I done, what have I said? Dear, dear, John, I never meant to vex you. Why has your face that look? What have I done? What does it mean?”

He put his arms round her, and held her to his heart: he kissed her forehead passionately.

“It means—it means—good-bye, my darling,” he said, and left her.

Dazed, terrified, Mary stood and gazed after him: then she burst into tears.

“Oh, me!” she sobbed, “something is wrong, something is wrong! He can’t mean good-bye for always! Gavin, Gavin, I wish you were here!”

CHAPTER IV.

ON Tuesday night, her interview with Mary over, Kate looked for John Cayford's return to the Manse with an anxiety far keener than that felt by Mr. Ferris. She heard his entrance; she heard his ascent to his room; and in the interval of silence that followed, deep sleep overcame her, holding her senseless until the village clock startled her into consciousness as it struck five.

Glorious sunshine flooded her room, glorious singing of birds filled the air without: to her, the light was glaring, the sounds were discordant—what right had Nature to be so vehemently joyful while human hearts suffered? Kate lay in torment, counting the minutes as they slipped away. How could she meet him? How could she bring herself to see his meeting with Mary? If he had not spoken openly to her of his intentions she might have feigned

ignorance: it was impossible, now, to feign ignorance. Dared she shew the pity she felt? Could she conceal it, when, without her volition, it spoke for itself through her quivering lips and tear-filled eyes? Misery, misery—her hands clenched themselves together—he would never trouble to read what was written in *her* face! Realising the egoism of the thought, she shrank from herself: was she then so worthless that with her even Love was but a subtle form of Selfishness?

She strove to recall all that her cousin had said on the previous evening; searching every sentence through, to find somewhere an indication that Mary's heart was not irrevocably given to this new lover. The more hopeless the task seemed, the more strenuous became her efforts: really, she was trying to exonerate herself in her own eyes from that degrading accusation of selfishness. Whatever she could do to bring happiness into the life that was so inexpressibly dear to her, must be done: she experienced a wretched satisfaction in thus adding to her own misery.

How swiftly time flew ! one hour more and they would all meet : yet how slowly that hour passed, lengthening itself interminably !

The summons to breakfast was heard at last : she let Mary precede her downstairs, waited a few moments to spare herself the sight of their meeting, and then followed. The utter desolation that came upon her when she was made aware of John's absence, revealed the fact that since the moment of her awakening she had stayed herself, fed her heart, animated her courage, with this one hope of seeing him again so soon.

In response to Mary's eager questions, Mr. Ferris explained that John had gone to Glasgow on business and might be away for some days, perhaps some weeks. Anxious that any possible movement of the young man's should appear perfectly natural, Mr. Ferris added that it was uncertain whether or no John would return to Feldrossan—the girls must remember that he had other friends with an equal claim on his time.

“Oh, Uncle !” protested Mary indignantly,

“John has no friends so near to him as we are. He would never stay away from us for weeks, nor leave the country without seeing us again. Kate and I know better than to think such a thing: he will certainly come back in a day or two.”

Kate left the assertion unconfirmed: but finding Mary alone a few minutes later, she gently kissed her. The unwonted caress was surprising: Mary slipped her arm round her cousin's waist, and returned the kiss with interest.

“How kind you are, dear Kate! You do that to shew me your sympathy with my happiness. I would like every one to have such happiness. I wish you shared it: I wish—I wish you knew how blessed it is to love and be loved so very dearly.”

Kate disengaged herself in haste. “Tastes differ!” she said coldly.

Afterwards, repenting this ungraciousness, she forced herself to listen with apparent interest to a recital of Mary's hopes and fears concerning the afternoon. It was not quite

certain that Gavin would come, a business engagement might keep him in town: and if he came, he would probably have but a short time to stay. If he were detained, he had promised to send a letter by the mid-day mail, so that in any case there was something to look forward to! Suppose he could come, would he be likely to travel by a slow train to Garleigh, or by a quick train to Laurieston where he could hire a conveyance to bring him to the Manse? A time-table was produced; Mary made abstruse calculations, and discovered that the Garleigh route allowed him barely thirty minutes with her, while the other gave him an hour's leisure. Kate said "I wonder," and "Very likely," and "Perhaps," and "I should think so," at appropriate intervals. The morning wore itself away.

From the village post office, Mary returned triumphant, waving an open letter.

"I am to have both the letter and himself, Kate. Is he not thoughtful! he has written to say that he *can* come. He drives from Laurieston: he will be here directly, and he can stay

two hours—of course my calculations were all wrong as usual. There is a note here for Uncle, will you take it to him?"

Since Mary's entrance, Kate had seen nothing but the familiar writing on that second envelope. She carried it to the study.

Mr. Ferris took it from her, glanced at it, and laid it down beside him unopened. Kate moved slowly through the room, collecting two or three vases that needed fresh flowers: as slowly, she recrossed the room and withdrew. Outside the door she paused, leaned against the wall for a moment, and looked down with contempt at her hands because they shook slightly.

"I don't care in the least," she said, lying to herself defiantly. "His movements are of no particular interest to me!"

"Was that John's writing?" inquired Mary when Kate reëntered the parlour. "What does he say?"

"I don't know. Uncle had not opened the letter."

"And you came away without waiting to

hear? What a pity! I want so much to know when he is coming back."

"Are you going to see to the flowers, Mary? This is the day for them."

"Oh, I quite forgot! I am so sorry. Never mind, I will fill every vase in the house to-morrow. You see, Kate dear, I can't think of anything this afternoon."

Fortified by Mr. Claverton's eulogy, Mr. Ferris was able to welcome Mary's suitor. The young man's manner pleased him exceedingly: it was deferential, as became his youth, and dignified, as became his station. Mr. Ferris was never unduly influenced by monetary considerations, but he could not help being pleasantly excited by Gavin's statements regarding his financial position.

In the evening Mary knelt beside the minister's chair, resting her golden head against his shoulder: she found him quite ready to gratify her with warm praises of her lover, and for long the two remained discussing the engrossing subject in all its bearings; Kate, occupied with the inevitable darning, strained her ears to

catch one word about the note received that afternoon ; she listened in vain, Mary had quite forgotten her anxiety to know when John was coming back. Twice Kate essayed to ask the simple question—the words died on her lips, she could not steady her voice to utter them. When she was in her own room preparing for the night, she caught sight of a white face reflected in her mirror. She stood there looking angrily into the eyes that met hers :—“ You *know* you do not care ” she informed her reflection with fierce emphasis. Suddenly she flung herself on her knees by the bed-side. “ Oh, I care—I do care ! ” moaned Kate.

Mr. Ferris left early on the following day to join his brother ministers at Glenessle. After his departure, Mary cleared the parlour table, and made elaborate preparations for letter writing. She arranged her writing case, pen, ink, paper, and a dictionary ; placed another book before her to serve as a prop for Gavin’s photograph ; and then, opening her case, she spread upon the table his two letters, and a

small selection she had made of newspaper cuttings which had direct or indirect reference to him.

Having carefully examined his letters and the newspaper notices, she spent some time in studying his portrait: then she dipped her pen in the ink, and paused. A glance at the letters shewed that he addressed her—"Dearest Mary": she wrote "Dearest"—feared it looked too demonstrative—destroyed that sheet of paper, and began "My dear Gavin," on another. Here, there came to her some reminiscence of him so absorbing that she laid down her pen to indulge in delightful thoughts. The letter had progressed no further when Kate came to find her some time later.

"You are not forgetting about the flowers, Mary?"

"No; but I shan't be any time over my writing. Did you notice, Kate, that one side of Gavin's face is a little different from the other?"

"It is the case with most faces," said Kate listlessly. "I have not looked at his much."

The weariness in her voice, drew Mary's attention to her : Kate stood by the window in full light, her face looked worn. Mary's gentle heart was distressed.

"Are you tired, Kate dear?" she asked.

"No," said Kate irritably, "I want a long walk. I shall go to those crofts at Overton that I have not been near for an age."

"But dinner! you will never get back in time."

"I can get a scone and some milk anywhere. You need not wait."

"Now that is what I call foolish!" reflected Mary, as Kate departed. "Why does she choose the hottest day we have had, for such a long walk? And I am sure she is tired already. What can be the matter, I wonder: perhaps Bella has been worrying her. Ah! if only she knew happiness like mine, she would not be so easily upset by little annoyances."

Kate's determination to walk to Overton was entirely unpremeditated. She had risen in the morning with the old listless apathy about her, which she dreaded to disturb too soon. Feel-

ing extreme weariness, she had resolved to occupy herself within doors; there was much writing to be done for Mr. Ferris, the excerpts from those Chinese Mission books had been too long neglected.

But the sight of Mary, so radiantly happy, sent soreness thrilling through Kate's heart. She could not stay there, listening all day to her cousin's joyful confidences; she was mastered by the desire to put as great a distance as possible between this happy girl and her own unhappy self. Moreover, it occurred to her, that if she could once find herself clear away from Mary and the Manse and the shore-path and the rocks—from everything, in short, that had power because of its associations to fascinate or wound her—she might be able at last to gauge her exact position, to probe this heart-soreness, to comprehend herself, perhaps to reason with herself. For Kate was never content to hide her head, ostrich-like, at the approach of danger: clearness of vision was a necessity to her, she could not away with disguises and deceptions. If ever she seemed to let herself drift

with closed eyes whither circumstance tended to carry her, she drifted wilfully, she held her eyes closed exactly so long as it suited her not to open them—painfully aware the whole time of the direction and measure of her drifting, forecasting with accuracy its probable end. Just now she had been stunned: she feared the agony of reviving sensation, but she still more feared ignorance as to the nature and extent of her misfortune.

One thing was certain—she could not continue to suffer thus. She could not endure to spend night after night sobbing by her bedside: nor to live through days in which Hope—cruel Hope—inextinguishable Hope—rose, mocked at Reason, fed itself on Fancy, grew, flourished, entranced, deluded, and then fell to the dust dragging her with it.

“Let me only tell myself the truth,” cried Kate in desperation, “and I must, for very shame, get quit of all this misery. Here is the truth: I who am no ignorant child, have allowed myself to love a man who never cared for me and never will—never cared for me and

never will—never cared for me and never will !” The proud girl writhed as she stabbed herself afresh with each recital of her humiliation. There was no doubt of her having faced the truth: alas, alas, the misery remained.

The Overton crofts toward which she walked, lay behind Main’s of Overton. To reach them, she had first to traverse the Garleigh road, and then a long and exceedingly rough path leading to the summit of a steep hill on whose further slopes were the crofts. Kate knew their inmates well, and had been wont to visit them regularly and frequently. Six months had now elapsed since her last visit: she told herself that she ought to feel compunction because of this neglect, yet she felt none. Neither was she conscious of her fatigue. The path seemed perhaps to have grown longer and rougher, as she stumbled, slipped, scrambled forward, without her usual swiftness and sureness of foot. Fatigue overcame her, nevertheless. She could scarcely drag herself to the top of the hill: gaining it, she was forced to pause, gasping for

breath, dizzy with the quick faint beating of her heart.

Upon the crofts lying scattered beneath her, she had often looked with intense interest, while her ready imagination pictured for her the details of the lives lived in them—lives so destitute of luxuries, of comforts, even of necessities; lives that were one long battle for bread; lives narrowed down to limits that seemed stifling to Kate; and withal, lives that were in the majority of cases, noble, courageous, triumphant.

The women in those crofts interested her chiefly. Contrasting their surroundings with her own, she bent her head in wonder and reverence at the sight of their unswerving allegiance to duty, their patient endurance, their unquestioning resignation. It was an intense gratification to her to know that on many occasions she had been able to carry consolation and sunshine into the hearts of some of these women. They all loved her: they gave her high praise when they said of her to one another, “Oor young lady isna a lady at a’; she micht be ane o’ hiz!”

To-day, Kate looked down upon the crofts with dull indifference. If she went there consolation would be looked for—she had none to communicate: sympathy would be demanded—her heart felt dead. She could not face these women; she, who had never come empty-hearted to them before! She hesitated, retraced her steps for a yard or two, and only paused on realising that she was too tired to go home without resting somewhere. She turned to look back at the cottages: “I can’t go there,” she gasped, “they will want me to read the Bible to them and sing hymns. I can’t do it: something must be dead in me: I can’t do it!”

With difficulty she made her way down the steep hill-side to a wood, where she seated herself on the moss at the foot of one of the trees. The wood seemed to swim before her, she saw everything as through a thick mist and from a long distance. She sat there so still, that a squirrel who had been demolishing the fresh young growth of the tree against which she leaned, flashed down the trunk to the ground at her side, and remained gazing fear-

lessly at her for a few seconds before he darted to a distance. There was refreshing coolness around her; faint breezes sighed among the tree-tops; occasionally the low crooning of wood pigeons was heard, varied by those strange creaking sounds that the pine trees make—half weird, half musical.

Gradually some colour stole back to Kate's face, her vision grew clearer, she felt revived. She began to notice her surroundings; she began to think. Looking at the watch fastened to her wrist, she reflected that Mary must have finished dinner some time ago, and would now be in the garden among her roses. Mary and roses—the association was so harmonious, so appropriate.

“What is there about Mary,” Kate asked herself, “that makes it natural to connect her with flowers? No one would ever think of me in connection with flowers! She is so beautiful, so gentle, so fragile: one feels instinctively that she must always live in sunshine and be protected from storms. Suffering seems so much more appropriate to some people than to others;

I cannot bear to think of Mary as a sufferer, she should always have love about her—I daresay she always will, for it comes to meet her wherever she goes. I have to work hard for love, and seldom get it; I wonder whether the poor folks up yonder would have loved me if I had done nothing for them. Mary has hearts given her in exchange for her smiles. It is quite fair—her smiles are very sweet—but it all seems so easy for her, and so horribly hard for me. Little children worship her; they fly to her for kisses as instinctively as flowers turn to the sun for light. There must be something in her that impels every one who sees her to love her: what can it be? Not merely the desire for love on her part—for she cannot possibly desire the love of all the children she kisses, nor of all the people she smiles on; and if desiring love could win it, I should get all I want. No: there must be some radical difference between her nature and mine! I feel it, but I can't define it. Perhaps it has to do with the natural goodness and purity of her character, which makes itself felt without any effort or even conscious-

ness on her part, just as the scent of a flower makes itself felt. She has an affinity for everything that is perfectly child-like and holy. If we two had been in Palestine when Christ died, I would have sought out Mary Magdalene—but Mary would have clung to the Madonna. That gives a suggestion of the difference between us.”

Another glance at her watch, warned Kate of the rapid flight of time. She rose to her feet with a sigh, unwilling to leave the solitude and refreshing calm. She felt wonderfully restored.

“There is nothing like facing one’s troubles,” said she cheerily, as she left the wood. “They are like wild beasts—Look at them steadily enough and they grow powerless to harm you. I have some sense, thank goodness! I can still see a thing in its true light. I have a strong will, too—one can get the better of anything, if one has good sense and a strong will!”

CHAPTER V.

CONSIDERING the reliance placed by Kate on her own common-sense and strength of will, it was perhaps a little unnecessary that she should so repeatedly assure herself of the efficacy of these excellent qualities. She descended from her hill-top in a mild state of self-glorification; secure in the possession of a power that could raise her far above the despicable weakness into which she had lately been betrayed. She even allowed herself to glide into contemplation of John Cayford's return—for that he would return, and return speedily, she had no doubt at all. This train of thought was so pleasant, so inspiring, so engrossing, that she was already half a mile beyond the Garleigh Station on her homeward way when she remembered that the scone and milk which were to have refreshed her had been forgotten. It was not worth her while to return to Garleigh for them, but she wished

she had been less forgetful. The hot, dusty; solitary road, stretched itself uninvitingly before her: the mile and a half that must still be traversed, seemed so long—her steps flagged, she was indeed very tired.

A sudden remembrance came to her of the day when she and John had walked from Garleigh together. How long ago that seemed: how old she had grown since then: now great a gulf was fixed between the Kate of to-day and the Kate of that day! Intolerable pain stirred at her heart—she sought to banish it by reminding herself feebly of common-sense and strength of will.

She had reached now the very spot at which, in old days, Alice Cayford had been wont to stand and admire the view of Ailsa Craig. Kate thought of her, and stopped; leaned against the dyke, clasped her hands upon the cool granite, and gazed out seawards. Happy, happy Alice!

But standing there would not bring the Manse any nearer to her. She looked wearily toward the road—and shook from head to foot

like an aspen leaf, as up the road, nearer, nearer, walking rapidly, his eyes bent on the ground, came Alice's brother. He was so near her—he was almost abreast of her—and he would not look up! Common-sense and strength of will became suddenly clamorous: Let him pass, they urged, Let him pass! He had all but passed. "John!" cried Kate in despair.

At sound of his name, he turned, too absorbed in thought to recognise her immediately: that short interval seemed an eternity of time to the girl.

"Why, Kate, I never saw you: how glad I am you spoke! This is my only chance to say good-bye. I go out to Melbourne next week."

She caught at the stones to steady herself.

"This—this is sudden."

"I thought of it yesterday. I made up my mind to-day."

He came nearer, and leaned against the dyke beside her.

Kate fixed her gaze on a solitary rock, projecting from the sea, whereon a large gull stood meditating solemnly. The bird and the rock

were motionless; everything else seethed, and swayed, and swirled, with the water. Why had she not listened to the dictates of common-sense, and let him pass?

"You will have to say good-bye to Mr. Ferris for me, Kate," said her companion. "I shall not have time to come down here again." He paused for a minute, and then added, "I have seen Mary. She seems very happy. Do you think her happy?"

With difficulty Kate articulated "Yes."

"She said Mr. Wishart was here yesterday. You must have seen him; were you pleased?"

"I scarcely noticed him. Uncle seems satisfied."

"Kate, will you do something for me?"

"Anything you wish."

"I want you to promise to send me a letter sometimes, while I am away. There is no Alice to write to me now; will you?"

"Yes."

"I must have some one to tell me about Mary. As I came along just now, I was wondering how I should get news from her. Some-

how I never thought of you"—Kate's fingers closed more tightly over the sharp edges of the granite—"but of course you are the very one who can tell me most about her. You are quick sighted, and she confides in you."

"I will do all I can: but when she goes to Glasgow I shall see little of her. She will have new friends, new interests."

"None that will displace you, Kate. She is far too faithful."

Kate was silent. She still stared fixedly at the gull, who suddenly flapped his wings, dipped into the sea, wheeled lazily around in the air, and settled himself on the rock once more, motionless as before. Again that giddy seething, swaying, swirling, of the earth and the water, made itself felt.

"So long as she is happy I shall be satisfied," John continued, "but troubles may come, and then—Kate, she must *not* have trouble: she is not able to bear it: it must be kept from her. If you see it near, you will tell me. I—I might be able to help her in some way. You see, I could so easily come home."

"Oh, quite easily!" assented Kate. Her heart was too sore for sarcasm. She spoke as though his return to Scotland in such circumstances would be the most natural proceeding in the world, would be the most efficacious remedy imaginable for trouble of any kind.

"You can't think what a relief it is to me, to know that I have you to depend on for this," he said.

"I am glad," she answered.

"Perhaps I shall be able to do you a good turn, some day. There is nothing I can do for you now, is there Kate?"

"Nothing."

"Well then, I suppose I should be moving on, I have to get back to town. Thank you with all my heart, Kate—with all my heart. Good-bye."

He held out his hand to her. She could not but take it; she was compelled at last to look away from the gull, and toward him.

Relieved from one anxiety, he was the more free to notice her. Suffering was evident in her face, and he could never look on suffering

unmoved. His recent experience had made him very pitiful, very tender-hearted; it had also quickened his perceptions. He liked this girl—loved her, in a way: after Mary, she came before any other of her sex in his estimation. He knew that she must be aware of his disappointment, but he had not intended to make direct allusion to it. Now—prompted by a strong impulse to give help if he could, since help was so clearly needed, he said—

“Are you too, in trouble, Kate?”

She tried hard to force herself to say “no.” She could not.

“Yes,” was her answer.

“I am sorry, dear,” he said, so kindly, so gently. “It’s a hard world for some of us, Kate, and we can do almost nothing to help each other over the rough places. But sympathy does give a little help, a little encouragement, doesn’t it?”

She bent her head.

“I have yours, I know, Kate: and you have mine.”

Kate tore her hands from his, and fastened

them about her throat. She felt as though rising sobs would strangle her. She wanted to choke them back, lest she should lose one word of what he was saying.

"Go on," she gasped, "you help me. Say more, say something more for me to remember."

"What can I say, dear? Happiness doesn't come to every one, and those who don't get it have just to make the best of their lives without it. We can do that, can't we? We can perhaps give all the better aid, where aid is needed, because we know what it is to feel want. Perhaps if we had been satisfied, we should have grown selfish."

"I might," she said, "but you would not. Thank you John, you have helped me. Remember that always, you have helped some one in trouble. You ought to go; I am not going to make you miss your train, I have delayed you too long. Let me know where to write, and I will tell you everything about Mary."

"And about yourself?" he said: but she left that question unanswered.

Time was precious, he had to leave her. Kate looked after him while he remained in sight.

“And there,” she said to herself, “goes out of my life the one man I have known who could have helped me to rise higher, to make a better thing of life. I would have had confidence in his judgment. He would have told me all my faults and helped me to get rid of them. And oh! I am not all selfish—I could have helped him, too. At the least, I would have been no hindrance to him—no hindrance——”

Blinding tears were in her eyes. She brushed them impatiently away, but the road, when she could see it again, was empty.

Mary was at the Manse door, waiting for her return.

“You have been away so long; I have wanted you so much!” she said.

“Why?” asked Kate, sinking into the first seat she could find.

For answer, Mary burst out crying. Kate

was on her feet again instantly, and had caught her cousin's wrist in a tight grasp.

"What are you crying for, Mary?" she demanded almost fiercely.

"Because—because—John has been here."

"Well!"

"And he says—oh, Kate, he says he is not coming back again."

"Well!"

"That means that we shan't see him any more."

"I suppose it does," said Kate sharply. "But you knew that he had his business to attend to: did you think he could stay here always?"

"No—only it's all so sad. I can't bear to think of his going away and never coming near us again," sobbed Mary.

"Mary! stop crying: you will make yourself ill if you go on like this. Think of something else! Get the tea ready."

Mary was roused: even the gentle Mary could be roused in time.

"You are most unfeeling, Kate," she ex-

claimed with indignation. "You never cared for him as I do. Of course his going away is not at all so hard for you as it is for me. You can't understand!"

"No, I can't understand," retorted Kate, at her wits' end. "I should have supposed it to be immaterial to you who goes or who stays, so long as you have Mr. Wishart in the neighbourhood. Certainly there are some things quite outside my comprehension! As tea is within it, I had better attend to that." She was almost beside herself. If she abated her harshness in the slightest degree, she would break down altogether—a disaster not on any account to be risked. Therefore she left Mary: poor Mary, who felt so sorely in need of consolation.

Mr. Ferris, returning presently from Glenessle, proved far more sympathetic. He let her cry out her grief on his shoulder; he comforted her by speaking confidently of John's return to Scotland at some later date; Mary had begun to smile again, by the time tea was ready.

Nevertheless, it was a gloomy meal. Kate,

in one of her unapproachable moods, sat stern and white at her end of the table. At sight of her face Mr. Ferris, who had been talkative before, became suddenly silent. He found his eyeglasses very much in need of polishing whenever he looked toward her, but his efforts did not in any way improve the dimness of vision he sought to remedy. Mary encouraged herself by surreptitious caressing of the last-received letter from Glasgow, until the delicious sense of possession betrayed her into an involuntary smile just as Kate happened to glance in her direction—whereupon, she started guiltily, withdrawing her hand from her pocket in haste. They were all relieved when Bella came to take away the scarcely-touched dishes.

Afterwards, Kate retired to her usual seat at a distance from the others. In and out, back and forth, darted her unresting needle. Not one of the many stitches made was visible to her. Years afterwards she found her work of that evening carefully laid away in an old box—a woollen sock, darned shapelessly, almost beyond possibility of recognition.

Mr. Ferris paced up and down the room for some time, glancing uneasily, now and again, at the darner. At length he subsided into his own chair by the window; whither Mary followed him, for a confidential chat.

"Well, dear," said the old man, "what did you do with yourself this morning?"

"Part of the time I wrote, Uncle; and part of the time I made plans."

"Mary made plans!" he said, touching her golden hair tenderly. "They must have been pretty plans; were they wise?"

"I don't know," sighed Mary—"I don't suppose so, since I made them. But you see, Uncle, I want so much to improve myself now."

"Why now?"

"Oh, because of Gavin."

"Does he think you want improvement?"

"I daresay he does. Of course he has not said so, yet: he has had so little time to find out. I have told him not to expect anything."

"Then he will have a great many surprises. And what are the plans, Mary?"

“There are several of them. I made up my mind to learn book-keeping: *that* would be useful, wouldn't it? Then I thought I ought to learn a little cooking from Bella. And there is a book about servants' duties, and their wages, and how you engage them; I found it in the bookcase here—I mean to read that carefully. But those are all plans for helping myself, and I wanted specially to be a help to Gavin. As he is so clever, I thought I had better begin with a little *very* solid reading: every day, you know, for perhaps half an hour at first—I dare say I should soon get to an hour.”

“But you belong to a reading society, don't you?”

“I did, once; but you see, there was a half-penny fine every time you missed your half hour, and it got to be too expensive for me. That was long ago, more than a year, I should think. I am much more in earnest now.”

“What ‘very solid’ books are you going to attack, Mary?”

“Well, Uncle, I am not sure whether to try Browning's poetry, or Mendelssohn's Letters.

I think it had better be Mendelssohn's Letters, because Gavin is so fond of music."

"And when are these great schemes to be carried out?"

"Oh, I meant to begin this afternoon—but John came." Mary's voice grew sad: she put her head down on her Uncle's shoulder. There was silence in the room for a long time.

At length the minister spoke. Mary never knew whether he meant his words for her, or was talking to himself as was sometimes his habit.

"Darkness is creeping over us," he said; "that means that light is rising upon others. So it is always in our lives. Gain involves loss: when happiness comes to me, sorrow falls elsewhere.

"Only I think we often estimate altogether wrongly, the value of gain and loss, happiness and sorrow, darkness and light. For I have known lives that are passed in darkness and struggle, grow far more full of light than those passed in peace and sunshine. I see joyful hearts centre themselves on the objects of their

joy and look no further: and I see sorrowful hearts stretch themselves out to aid the sorrowing everywhere—a sword has pierced them through, therefore the thoughts out of many hearts are revealed to them.

“ Yet who am I, to say whether the joyful or the sorrowing are nobler? God sends to each what is right for each. Those who receive joy, fulfil their destiny as truly as those to whom sorrow is appointed. Here, before each of us, lies the path we have to tread: leave it we must not, glorify it we may!”

He ceased speaking. Mary felt awed, almost frightened. Kate’s needle was still at last; her hands were idle; her work had slipped unheeded to the floor, and lay there at her feet.

CHAPTER VI.

As John Cayford travelled back to town, the definite plan of action which had seemed so hopelessly inconceivable in the morning, began slowly to shape itself before him. Out of the confusion in his mind, one determination arose, powerful, irresistible, bringing order with it: at all hazards, at any cost, Mary's happiness must be secured! So entirely essential did this appear, that in view of it the idea of violating his oath to Alan became less and less revolting, became familiar, became an accepted necessity.

"Alan loved her," he argued, "therefore he would have been ready to make any sacrifice for her. Had he known that the production of these papers must involve her in misery, he would have destroyed them without hesitation: if I can convince myself that their production will bring more pain than profit—I shall destroy them."

He knew that the thought of Mary so swayed him as almost to deprive him of the capability to judge righteous judgment. He tried to put away all recollection of her ; to view the matter solely as it affected the interests of Alan, Mr. Anderson, Richard Twiss. Over this last name, he pondered long. Richard's relationship to the accused man surely gave him a right to the knowledge of his brother's innocence. How deeply he had seemed to feel the disgrace attached to him by Alan's supposed misdemeanour ! John recalled his own impulsive intention to lighten the weight of grief that seemed to crush Richard, by naming the real defaulter ; he could not now be sufficiently thankful that he had resisted that impulse.

On the other hand, he remembered Alan's letter to his brother. There was an allusion in it which he did not understand, and on which the papers in Alan's box relating to the sale of the Braehead Street property would probably throw some light. He waived the consideration of Richard's claims until he should have examined these.

As to Mr. Anderson: John figured him as a kind-hearted employer, who had been bitterly disappointed in the character of one in whom he had interested himself. Was it worth while to purchase his gratification at the cost of such disaster elsewhere? He had possibly almost forgotten the matter.

And Alan? Certainly his main desire had been to have his name cleared in Mary's eyes. He had said distinctly that he cared nothing for the opinion of others, but only for hers. He had died with that eager appeal on his lips "Tell Mary." She had been told: poor Alan! she could scarcely remember his name! What good could possibly be done to him by the public revelation of his innocence and another's guilt? None. And that other would suffer social damnation. And Mary—John realised her nearness again, felt the pressure of her hand upon his arm, saw the love-light shining in her eyes, heard her dear voice saying—"My love for Gavin, is—is *me*. It lives with my life, it *is* my life; nothing can change it." Oh, no, no, no! the papers must not be shewn: at all

hazards, at any cost, Mary's happiness must be secured. He had a disagreeable consciousness all the while, that these same arguments would have had no weight whatever with him, but for the crushing conviction that the hope of winning Mary for himself was at an end.

There was still an "If" in the case. Wishart's fate was not yet decided: it would not be decided, until his present reputation had been more closely examined. For Mary's sake, John was willing to adopt the opinion expressed by Corbett in his letter to Alan—that Presslie had intended no harm, had been in great straits for want of money, had yielded suddenly under stress of temptation: but he had no intention of permitting Mary's happiness to be placed where there was not good ground for belief that it would be secure. He intended to make as thorough an investigation of Gavin's character as he possibly could, with the means and the time at his disposal. He had friends in Glasgow who could aid him in the matter: ladies who would probably know Gavin socially, and men who would certainly know his standing

among men. He intended to apply to these, without loss of time; there was indeed no time to lose, since his decision must be arrived at before the prospective interview with Richard Twiss took place. On his way from the station to the hotel, he reminded himself that there were sundry remembrances which he had brought with him from Melbourne for these friends of his, and that he had not yet opened the case containing them. He also tried to remind himself of something that hovered just outside his mental grasp, yet refused to come within it. He was conscious that he had been haunted all afternoon by this same ghost of a recollection—was it of words, or of music, or both? It was something he had heard quite recently. He tried to connect it with the music that had been performed in the empty church the night before, but he could not: it certainly had some close association with words, and there had been no words with that music. Again and again he was on the point of grasping it, yet always it eluded him. It was annoying to be so persistently haunted by a fancy so vague.

When he reached his room, he prised open the packing case. Within it, in addition to his own belongings, he was dismayed to find various parcels, which he had undertaken to transmit from friends of his in Melbourne to friends of theirs in Glasgow, and which he had till now completely forgotten. He unpacked them in haste, that they might be despatched as speedily as possible together with notes of apology for his very culpable negligence. One of them, larger than the rest, required force to dislodge it from its place. He lifted it out with difficulty, remembering that he had found it awkward to pack, and had thought as he thought now, that the kindly Scotchwoman who consigned this bulky parcel to his care, was rather inconsiderate. It contained rare and valuable books, she had told him; stray numbers of Beethoven's arrangements of Scotch Songs. She had picked them up at second-hand book stores, and wished them to be conveyed to a nephew of hers, who would appreciate the treasure. John looked for the address: the parcel was directed to Gavin Wishart.

As he deciphered the name, there came to him a transitory glimpse of the haunting recollection that had so tantalised him. It vanished instantly, yet not altogether.

"Fear of death," he kept repeating to himself. "Fear of death—that was certainly part of it! But where on earth have I heard the words lately? And how are they connected with Gavin Wishart?" Memory refused to help him further.

This business of despatching parcels and writing apologies, occupied him until late in the evening: when it was completed, he took up Alan's papers with the intention of examining those among them that had reference to Richard Twiss. Try as he would he could not apply his mind to the Braehead Street property. His thoughts persistently wandered where his eyes led them, to that lovely girlish face reproduced so perfectly by Alan's pencil. He leaned back in his chair, and, perforce, gave himself license to think of her. Memory was eager to picture to him the Manse garden, the glowing roses, and Mary. He could hear the droning of

bees, the dash of waves upon the shore—and Mary's voice now gay, now earnest, now sad. All her words came back to him, as he listened: her happy confidences, her proud praise of her lover—that incomparable lover, who was so clever, who knew so much, who did everything so well, whose favourite study was music! Stay—here at last was the clue to that haunting recollection! He found himself listening intently to the weird dirge-like minor air, linked in recitative with the words “He came to deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

“Substitute the word ‘Discovery’ for the word ‘Death,’ reflected John, “and I can understand how he has contrived to express so much fear in the music.”

The darkness had grown deep: it was close on midnight: he laid aside Alan's papers till the morrow. His last waking vision was of a face, white and sad, with dark eyes that looked into his almost despairingly. “Poor Kate,” he thought, “what a contrast she is to Mary! Will the devil keep her awake to-night, I

wonder? She is a strange, incomprehensible girl: I wish she were happier—poor Kate!”

On Friday morning, the carefully prepared “Memoranda of my Brother’s dealings with me: and details of the sale for £6000, of our property in Braehead Street,” were closely examined. They included an exact account of the various sums paid by Richard to his brother; ending with the note of the £200, in exchange for which Alan had agreed to resign all further claims on their joint property. There was no evidence among the mass of notes, newspaper cuttings and letters, to support Richard’s representation that the property had depreciated in value—the contrary seemed to be the case: but there was proof that Richard had concluded the sale of the houses for £6000, by private bargain, on the very day that Alan consented to relinquish his claim on them. How Alan could have allowed himself to be so duped, appeared almost incomprehensible: his negligence in looking into his own affairs, was only to be accounted for when his ill health and youth were taken into consideration.

When John tied together the Memoranda before returning them to their place, his opinion of Richard Twiss had undergone considerable change: it was destined to be still further changed during the day.

He succeeded beyond his expectations in finding among his acquaintances those who could enlighten him as to the place occupied by Gavin Wishart in the general esteem. Both as regarded his public and his private life, this young man was held to be altogether blameless, altogether praiseworthy. Yet, while he listened to the eulogies pronounced by one person after another, upon Mary's lover, John felt a growing pity for him: begotten of the conviction that Gavin, in spite of his enviable position in the world's estimation, must constantly, through fear of discovery, be subject to a degrading and intolerable bondage.

In the course of his inquiries, John also gleaned some further information concerning Twiss; whereby his impression that the lawyer was a scamp, became strengthened. Undenially, he would have viewed these two men in an

entirely different light had he had the remotest grounds for hoping that Mary's attitude toward himself might be altered : he realised this fact at intervals, and despised himself.

When the hour of his appointment with Richard Twiss drew near, he repaired to the room in which he had elected to receive his visitor.

Throughout the day he had been fully occupied : its climax—this coming interview—was close at hand, and the closer it came the less prepared for it did he feel. The end he had in view was clear ; the means by which he hoped to attain it were clear also ; but whether these means were justifiable, whether they would suffice, what he should do in the event of their failing to suffice—all this was not clear at all. He had grasped hastily at the most effective plan for securing Mary's happiness that had suggested itself to him ; and now that the time for putting it into execution had arrived, he felt as though he were grasping a shadow. All the advantages of this arrangement had been prominent until this moment, when they effaced

themselves in favour of its defects. And time pressed so! There was no longer any leisure left in which to devise an alternative course of procedure.

A card lay on his table, left there by some one who had called that afternoon, and, finding him absent, had expressed an intention to call again in the evening. As he looked at the name on this card, John felt his perplexities increase. He was debating whether or no to deny himself to all visitors that night, when Twiss was announced.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT inspiring vision of the Finger of Providence, by which Richard Twiss had been so much encouraged while he prepared to leave town on Thursday, remained with him until his return on Friday. During his stay he experienced a delicious ease of mind, his difficulties vanished one by one, and brilliant prospects spread themselves before him. He was able to look forward complacently to the proposed meeting with Gavin Wishart on Tuesday, because he saw himself in imagination purchasing Argentine Bonds in London on Monday. He even mapped out for the new securities a career of most successful duplicity. Mental ease, induced physical ease: for a brief space of time he enjoyed complete immunity from fear, either of loss or of pain.

Unfortunately the vision grew less distinct as he returned to the City: by the time he had reached the Central, it had almost deserted him.

John was not more beset by doubts and dreads, than was his visitor.

Having met, the two men promptly exerted themselves to evade the object of their meeting. They spoke of the appearance of the country, of the forward state of the crops, of possible danger to the harvest from drought at present and from floods later on. They discussed the Cooper's Mill fire and its attendant disasters. John made particular inquiries as to his companion's health: Twiss, in his turn, asked whether Mr. Cayford intended to remain long in Scotland.

"No," said John, "I leave almost immediately. I sail from Plymouth next week."

A pause ensued. Each measured his chances of success, and found them small: each grew more resolutely determined to obtain what he wanted, in some way.

"I have not forgotten our conversation in your office yesterday," John said at length. "You made a request then which I promised to consider. I have considered it."

Twiss leaned forward in his chair, breathing

with difficulty: he put his hand to his heart, not because he felt pain there, but because that horrible dread of pain, that paralysing terror, had begun to creep over him. As in a lighting flash, he suddenly saw what his position would be if the money were denied to him: the sight filled him with alarm, almost with despair. He tried to speak, but his lips could scarcely shape words.

“Your answer?” he managed to say.

“I have a proposal to make to you, Mr. Twiss. I will not lend you the money”—Richard almost ceased breathing—“but you can have it if you will, on one condition.”

“What condition?”

“Your brother has told you of his innocence. He has told you that I hold the proofs of it, and here they are. I propose to exchange this cheque, for your consent to the destruction by me of these proofs before any one but myself has seen them. Will you take it?”

Twiss stared in amazement from the long strip of paper held toward him, to the bundle of papers on the table, and to John's face. He

had not thought twice of his brother's letter; salvation for himself had not seemed to lie anywhere in that direction. But clearly these proofs were of importance! He tried to rally his wits. His hand stole involuntarily out to the cheque.

"If Alan is innocent, who is guilty?" he asked, hesitating.

"I have not the remotest intention to tell you. Your brother left instructions that these proofs were to be shewn, not to you at all, but to a third person. Since I reached this country certain facts have come to my knowledge which lead me to believe that, had he known all I know, Alan would have destroyed his papers before his death. I take upon myself the responsibility of acting as I believe he would have wished me to act. With your consent, I shall destroy his papers without consulting this third person: I ask for your consent mainly because your name has had disgrace attached to it, which these proofs would clear away."

"What if I refuse to give it?"

"You will not refuse. You need this money."

"I am to consider the money in the light of compensation for a disgraced name?"

"You are at liberty to consider it in any light you choose."

"I should have heard nothing at all about the matter, I conclude, if Alan had not alluded to it in his letter to me. He has been particularly fortunate in his choice of an executor, Mr. Cayford: he is to be congratulated, I think."

John was silent.

"Perhaps," sneered Richard, "I am to understand that you prefer to have the odium of forgery attached to a relative of mine rather than to a relative of yours! That would not be unnatural."

"Understand precisely what you please. *I* had the impression yesterday, that a very disagreeable odium would attach itself to your name, if this sum of money were not forthcoming to-morrow."

Richard's fingers closed upon the paper.

"I will take it," he said.

"Thanks," returned John. "Then we may consider our interview at an end."

Twiss examined the cheque, placed it in his pocket book, rose—and then re-seated himself.

"I would prefer to see those papers destroyed," he said suspiciously.

"Oh, by all means ! I am delighted to have you as a witness. It is possible that we shall have a second : I am expecting your friend Mr. Wishart to call immediately."

"I shall not stay," said Richard, rising in haste.

"There is one packet here," continued John, turning over the papers, "that you may care to preserve. I am not anxious to destroy it, and it contains some rather interesting information. Alan has labelled it, 'Memoranda of my brother's dealings with me : and details of the sale for £6000, of our property in Braehead Street.' Do you want it ?"

Richard swore ; seized the packet tendered to him, and departed.

"That kind of reptile," reflected John, "must live in perpetual fear of discovery: he has perhaps grown used to the bondage."

He sighed with relief at the thought that he was now free to destroy the papers: yet he was far from feeling altogether at ease in his mind. Since he had announced his intention to violate his promise to Alan, that promise seemed to have become particularly binding.

Mary's happiness, Mary's happiness! at all costs, it must be secured.

Dusk was falling, a damp mist enveloped the city. John set light to the fire in his grate; the damp chilled him, and a fire would be useful. Up leaped the flames, shedding a ruddy glare throughout the room! He gathered together his papers—Mary's picture being uppermost—and drew his chair to the fire-side. The glowing light illumined her face, her lovely, happy face. No sorrow must shadow it, no trouble must come to her that he could keep at a distance.

There was a stir within the room, Gavin Wishart entered.

In three minutes the young man had said various graceful things in a graceful way. He apologised for his intrusion, expressed thanks for the parcel of books brought from Melbourne, regretted that his aunt should have trespassed so largely on Mr. Cayford's good nature, and alluded to Feldrossan as a place where they had interests in common. John watched him, as he seated himself in the fire-light, and failed to detect in his face any sign that he was subject to a terrible bondage through fear of discovery.

The firelight, glancing here and there, fell brightly on Mary's picture and attracted Gavin's notice to it. He uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise. John handed the drawing to him.

"This is excellent indeed!" said Wishart. "I had no idea that you were an artist."

"I am not: that was drawn by a young friend of mine—Alan Twiss."

Gavin started so violently, that the paper flew from his hand to the ground. John lifted it up. He had had one momentary glimpse of

a face disfigured by fear, thereafter he kept his eyes fixed on the drawing in his hand.

“Alan Twiss had rather a sad history,” he said. “I met him as he was on his way home from Melbourne: we travelled together as far as Tenerife, where he died, just as we were landing. He had left home in ill health two years before, and had been accused of forgery after he left. He had been successful in collecting proofs of his innocence; he was coming home to clear his name. At Tenerife he expected to meet a friend who could give evidence that would incriminate the forger. I learned that this friend of his was already dead. Alan’s proofs however, were quite sufficient: he left them in my hands, trusting to me to see justice done. Three weeks ago I came to Glasgow to carry out his wishes. There were delays. The papers were to be handed to a Mr. Anderson, who was absent from town; I had to wait his return. He returns on Monday, but in the interval—my determination has been changed. I have resolved, rightly or wrongly, to break my pledge to Alan. The name of the forger was

known solely, *solely*, to Corbett, to Alan, and to myself. Corbett and Alan are now dead ; and I hold all the proofs in my hands, here. This is the forged receipt. These are three letters written by the forger to Corbett : the first one proves that the writer was in need of money ; the second proves that he was an adept in the art of imitating handwritings ; the third proves that he was with Corbett at the time when, and in the place where, the receipt was forged. Here are other two letters, from Corbett to Alan, giving full details. All these papers, which I undertook to produce, I am now going to burn."

He dropped them, one by one, into the fire.

"And now," he said "there is absolutely no proof whatever, remaining. Every one of the papers consigned to me by Alan is destroyed ; excepting this, which I intend to keep."

He continued to look steadily at the drawing, his head turned away from the figure beside him.

For several minutes neither sound nor movement was made. Then John's arm was touched.

He looked at his companion : Mary would have found it difficult to recognise her lover—his face was so white, so haggard.

“Mr. Cayford—” he began, and could not articulate another word.

“You, too,” said John slowly, “you, too, are distressed at the thought of poor Alan’s sad life; and yet are relieved that, since he is dead, the other should go free. The happiness of other lives is a thing to be guarded. Mary’s happiness has always been dear to me : she tells me that you are to have the care of it. I hope—I believe, it is in safe hands.”

Still, Gavin could not utter one word. The two looked at each other in silence : their hands met for a moment : then Gavin rose, and went.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN left for the South, on Saturday : his hasty departure excited little comment, his short visit was soon almost forgotten. At the Manse, Mary was the only one who spoke much of him ; and, as the mention of his name invariably reduced Kate to silence, Mary concluded that, for some altogether unimaginable reason, Kate must have taken a dislike to him. Mary would have felt great soreness of heart regarding this matter, had not her lover proved so ready to hear and speak of the absentee. She thought it an additional proof of Gavin's goodness, that he should take such a vivid interest in her dear John.

"I really believe that you will soon come to admire and like him as much as I do, Gavin !" she exclaimed, one day.

"Perhaps I do so already," he answered.

The prolonged spell of glorious weather

which had lasted so long, came to an end at length. The finest June that had been known for years, was succeeded by a stormy July: the wind raged, the sea lashed itself into fury, wrecks strewn the coast, the newspaper columns were filled daily with lists of casualties and disasters. At night time, Kate would stand for hours by her window in a state of wretched despair; for the "Curlew" was nine days out from England, and there was no word yet of her arrival at Tenerife. Kate watched inky masses of cloud tear their way across the sky; she looked lower, and saw white surf driven furiously upon the rocks. The darkness that descended to blot out all sights, seemed to lend a terrible intensity to all sounds. While Kate stared, wide-eyed, into impenetrable blackness, all her senses seemed to merge themselves into her power of hearing. She listened to the roar of the sea, the moaning and wailing of the wind, until sound became an unendurable torture, and, with hands pressed tight against her ears, she paced up and down her room in misery.

Early one morning, the "Curlew" floated gently into Santa Cruz Bay, and lay at anchor there, safe from the furious storm through which she had passed. Calm and sunshine and beauty greeted her; the burning wind of noon-day, had not arisen. It was the hour of Mass. Spanish ladies, who had not yet been driven by the heat to Laguna, were on their way to the Iglesia de la Concepcion. Their long black dresses and black mantillas, contrasted strangely with the brilliant colours worn by the peasants, who trooped down the Plaza to the Mole, bearing roses and magnolias and oleanders--peaches and grapes and loquots, wherewith to tempt the newly arrived passengers.

Two of these, landing at the Mole, made their way as quickly as the heat would allow, up the Plaza and down the Calle Cruz Verde. They followed the black robed ladies to the Iglesia de la Concepcion, passed that, crossed the bridge, and turned from the Calle San Carlos into a wide rough road, flanked on one side by a steep barranco. From this, a sharp

turn to the left brought them within view of their destination.

Facing them was a long white wall. It had two entrances—wooden doors, each surmounted by an iron cross. Behind it lay the Spanish and English cemeteries: before it stood a Spaniard, who, at the approach of the strangers, opened for them the right hand gate leading into the English division.

They found themselves in a small plot of ground thickly crowded with graves. There was one tree in it, a large pepper tree, standing in the centre and shading the whole. With some difficulty they succeeded in making the Spaniard understand their quest. He led them to a grave in the extreme corner on the right hand side. A banana plant and a rose bush, decorated Alan's resting-place.

With the same constricted feeling about their throats as when they had watched by Alan on the Mole, these two men stood looking at his grave.

Suddenly a low sound of chanting was

heard : it remained for long, distinct in John's memory. The Spaniard moved away to unfasten the gate of the other cemetery. Dr. Brand, John's companion, followed the man, and stood with him watching the procession that came slowly up the Calle San Sebastian—priests first, then the coffin, then the mourners. The Spaniard entered into a long disquisition on the fever that was causing so many deaths in Santa Cruz at this season. Dr. Brand listened, nodded his head and said "Si, si" at intervals, although he could understand very little of what was said.

John, meanwhile, knelt down beside the grave, cleared away earth until he had uncovered a fairly deep space, and then took up a small metal box that he had brought there with him. He unlocked it, looked steadily for a few moments at the picture of a lovely face lying within, then fastened it and buried it out of sight under the earth.

"An absurd piece of sentiment!" he remarked to himself as he turned away.

The chanting grew louder and louder—the

procession came nearer and nearer. They waited until it had passed into the Spanish cemetery. Then they made their way, slowly, through the burning heat, back to the ship.

THE END.

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